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Making sense of men's experiences and progression through social work programmes

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Making Sense of Men's Experiences and Progression through Social Work Programmes

Volume 1 of 1

Jason Howard Schaub

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Social and Policy Sciences

February 2017

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Abstract

Social work is one of several professions closely associated with caring and femininity, and, as a result, often suggested as a non-traditional occupational choice for a man. Men's generally poorer educational experience becomes more prominent when studying a subject associated with femininity such as social work (Severiens and ten Dam 2012). Men have more progression issues than women on English university social work courses (Hussein *et al.* 2008; Schaub 2015), and our understanding of how men experience social work education is limited. This thesis examines in-depth men social work students' experience and progression, in order to determine the underlying reasons for men's poorer progression. Twenty-one social work student men from seven English universities were interviewed using qualitative methods. The study found participants described a complex, layered set of experiential and progression challenges that are specific to men. These impediments appear to combine, for some men, with other non-gender specific difficulties, thereby increasing the likelihood of failure or withdrawal. Some men are able to manage these issues, but others find them more challenging, suggesting some men experience a cycle of academic struggle and disengagement closely linked to their identity as men training to become social workers. In order to understand their experience, several theoretical strands were applied. Theories of stigma, masculinities and student retention were used to provide explanations for the challenges found for the men interviewed. In addition to providing a voice for men social work students, this study makes recommendations for social work educators and programmes to support men to more successfully complete social work courses.

List of Abbreviations

BME – Black and Minority Ethnic
CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSWE – Council on Social Work Education
DfE – Department for Education
DfES – Department for Education and Skills
EC – European Commission
EHRC – Equality and Human Rights Commission
ESRC – Economic and Social Research Council
EU – European Union
GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education
GSCC – General Social Care Council
HCPC – Health and Care Professions Council
HE – Higher Education
HEA – Higher Education Academy
HEFCE - Higher Education Council for England
HEI – Higher education institution
HESA – Higher Education Statistics Agency
ITT – Initial Teacher Training
LGB – Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PE – Practice Educator
STEM – Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TDA – Training and Development Agency for Schools
UCAS – University and College Admissions Service
UK – United Kingdom
USA – United States of America
USC – University of Southern California
WMO – Women-majority Occupation

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Social work in the United Kingdom (UK) is often considered a non-traditional occupation for men (Christie 1998b) because of associations between social work tasks and caring and femininity (Cree 1996). Women social workers currently outnumber men three to one in England (HCPC 2016a), and the ratio of men to women is likely to decrease further, as the proportion of men studying social work in the UK has dropped over the past 30 years. The ratio of men social work students decreased from 35 per cent in 1980 to 25 per cent in 1991 (Lyons *et al.* 1995) and in the early 2000s dropped to the current level of 15 per cent (GSCC 2012; Skills for Care 2016). The General Social Care Council (GSCC), the previous social work regulator in England, believed the ratio of men social workers in England will continue to decrease in the future, because the profession includes a higher proportion of qualified men social workers close to retirement age than younger men (and students), suggesting an ongoing decrease in the numbers of men in the profession in England (GSCC 2012). Not only has the proportion of men applying to study social work decreased, men have worse progression than women on social work courses in England (Furness 2012; Hussein *et al.* 2009; Schaub 2015a). Both policy makers and scholars have expressed concerns with the low number of men in social work in the UK (Ashcroft 2014; Galley and Parrish 2014; Parker and Crabtree 2014; Phillips and Cree 2014), and it seems self-evident that to change the gender ratio of the profession, the numbers of men students progressing to qualification would need to increase. There are few studies exploring men's experiences of studying social work (Giesler and Beadlescomb 2015; Schaub 2015a). This thesis presents findings from a PhD study examining in depth men's social work course progression issues and their experience of studying social work in England.

The way gender affects experience for professionals has previously been explored in some depth (Simpson 2009; Williams 1993), but there is far less knowledge about the experience of men students seeking to join women-majority

occupations¹ (WMO) (Giesler and Beadlescomb 2015; Shen-Miller and Smiler 2015). Student experiences can help to understand how gender affects and presents in these professions. Importantly, if social work and other WMO seek a more diverse workforce (including men), then the experiences of students need to be understood (Weaver-Hightower 2011). There are concerns that the 'paucity of literature about men's experience in social work limits the scope of awareness about the topic' (Giesler and Beadlescomb 2015, p.148). In addition, the interplay of masculinity and men's position in social work is mostly absent from social work literature, with only some recent texts attempting to address this gap (Pease 2015).

But to consider men's place in social work and social work education, we must first consider the central question of whether (or why) social work needs more men. Most scholars writing about the topic only tentatively engage with the issue of increasing the number of men in social work, often juxtaposing the low numbers of men in the profession with complicating factors such as their rapid rise into positions of power (Cree 2001; Pease 2011). Many English social work educators wish to increase the number of men on their courses, however, Moriarty and Murray (2007) found the low number of men applicants was a prominent topic during their interviews with every social work course in England. Some policy makers are concerned about the gender ratio in social work courses, identifying social work as having a poor gender ratio needing change (Woodfield 2014; Scottish Funding Council 2016a). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2015b) suggests when subjects are significantly gendered (such as social work being associated with women), this impacts on the gender equality of educational outcomes. Three different reasons are often posited about why we might wish to increase the

¹ The phrase 'women-majority' is used decidedly here (instead of 'female-dominated' or 'traditionally female'), because while there are more women in these occupations, they do not predominate in positions of authority, power or financial reward (Pringle 1995; Christie 1998b; McPhail 2004).

number of men social workers in the global profession: using men as role models; improving professional status and prestige; and to improve gender diversity (Fiore and Facchini 2013; Pease 2011).

An oft-discussed reason to increase men in social work is to provide more men as role models for men and boys. Proponents of this argument suggest boys and men service users benefit from engaging with men professionals (such as social workers) as positive male role models (Tarrant *et al.* 2015). Following this thinking suggests that boys and men would engage better with men social workers than with women, and highlight concern for boys and men's current engagement. This argument has been critiqued by a number of scholars (Cameron 2001; Pease 2007; Tarrant *et al.* 2015); most recently by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) study *Do boys need male role models? Gender Identities and Practices in Work with Young Men*, which considered boys engagement with education and welfare professionals (including social workers). Their findings suggest boys and young men respond more to worker's commitment than to their gender, and suggests using this idea as a driver for increasing men in social work is problematic (Tarrant *et al.* 2015). The evidence suggests men and boys are able to engage with professionals of either gender, and select role models for a variety of reasons with gender playing a less significant role than other considerations.

The professional status and prestige argument suggests that increasing the number of men in social work would improve the status of the profession, therefore increasing social work wages, working conditions and prestige. By improving the gender ratio, social work could become as prestigious as medicine or law, both professions with higher proportions of men. This argument relies on gender inequality to improve the status of the social work profession, by perpetuating the higher status of men compared to women. There are obvious

issues with this argument, given social work's declared stance on gender equality as a central element of its aim to improve social justice (IFSW 2014).

The gender diversity argument suggests the social work profession should better reflect diversity represented in society, including a range of identities such as people with disabilities, a range of ethnic and cultural background and more men. This argument suggests service delivery would improve because a broader range of diverse social workers would represent society more closely, as opposed to a predominantly white, middle class, women workforce. This argument has an inherent difficulty because when men enter WMO, they tend to gain positions of power rapidly (McPhail 2004; Pease 2011; Williams 1992), perpetuating gender inequality. One way to address this difficulty would be to use men's position in social work to assist in broadening perceptions of what are 'naturally' masculine or feminine roles, showing men can provide care and women can undertake senior leadership roles. Using men's position in social work as a fulcrum to improve gender equality, and to promote a more diverse workplace is more useful and productive than the other two arguments. Indeed, Fiore and Facchini (2013) suggested this argument was 'something which many social workers hope for' (pg. 321). In addition, men social workers can be encouraged to consider their choices through a gender equality lens, and determine if they are increasing or diminishing inequality by their choices (such as promotion to positions of management or power).

Improved gender equality not only benefits women's and girls' lives (United Nations 1979; United Nations 1995), but improves society in general, as well as men and boys' lives. Messner (1997) argues men's lives can be improved by improving gender equality, because by 'rejecting hegemonic masculinity and its rewards, we may also become more fully human. For I am convinced that the humanization of men is intricately intertwined with the empowerment of women' (pg. 110).

These different arguments suggest continued interest by scholars, services and policy makers in the low numbers of men in social work, with several differing opinions as to any benefits to an increase in the ratio of men social workers.

Introducing the Research Questions

This thesis set out to understand men's social work student experience to make sense of their poorer progression. To do this, it used the following research question to guide the enquiry:

Why are there greater progression problems for men than for women in social work courses in England?

During the initial phase of the study, four further sub-questions were developed to provide further focus to the study:

1. *How does men's social work progression relate to men's general experience in education?*
2. *How do the progression issues for men in social work compare to other WMO professions?*
3. *How is the progression for other minority groups in social work?*
4. *What are men's experiences of studying social work, and can these experiences help us understand their progression problems?*

There is significant literature about men and masculinity (Beasley 2005), and significant literature exploring student progression (Tinto 2005). Neither could adequately explain this issue, because literature about men is often concerned with men's general experiences (understandably), and studenthood only forms a small portion of adult men's lives; secondly, student progression literature is often constructed using predominantly samples of young men, but is typically presented as gender-neutral (Braxton *et al.* 1997). As a result, this thesis straddles and engages with both these literatures and wider social work education knowledge to understand English men student's experiences and progression in social work education.

Because this study is both qualitative and interpretivist, it is important to acknowledge and clarify my own personal narrative and background. Being a social worker, and a man, and having studied social work at university, I initially felt a connection with the future participants of this study. I have had my own experiences relating to the scarcity of men in the social work profession in England, from working as a social work practitioner in the UK for seven years (as well as previous experience in Republic of Ireland and the United States of America (USA)). I am a social work academic, and have taught social work students at a university for almost 10 years. Identifying and understanding the progression problems of men on social work courses resonated with my personal experiences of supporting men on their journey to become social workers. I have supported men social work students during their course experience, some with significant challenges. In my experience, there often seemed to be a disconnect between what was being asked of them by the social work course and their reactions, requiring they attempt new and different ways of responding to challenges. I am, therefore, committed to understanding the issue of men's progression in social work, as well as to try to find ways to resolve their progression issues, as from my experience these challenges frequently appeared to be an upsetting and shameful experience for them.

Considering the problems men experience as a result of their gender can suggest a lack of sensitivity to the more significant impact of misogyny on women and girls. But, as hooks reminds us,

'While it in no way diminishes the seriousness of male abuse and oppression of women, or negates male responsibility for exploitative actions, the pain men experience can serve as a catalyst calling attention to the need for change.' (hooks 1984, p.72)

This suggests that by examining men's experiences of challenges, we can improve our understanding of gender norms more generally. By exploring situations of challenge for men, it is possible to expose gender practices and how they constrain individuals. When men transgress gender boundaries, they can be

understood as engaging in 'undoing gender' (Butler 2004; Deutsch 2007; Risman 2009), and they sometimes experience retribution as a result of crossing these gendered occupation boundaries (Simpson 2009; Weaver-Hightower 2011; Williams 1993). This thesis sought to understand how the participants experienced the social work educational experience and any constraints they perceived for them to become social workers because they were men.

It is important to note that even though this study makes frequent uses of the two polarised constructs of 'men' and 'women', this study engages with conceptualisations of gender that is fluid, changing depending on social context and time period (Linstead and Pullen 2006). It is helpful to note that scholars have identified that social work could engage more with the fluidity of gender (Hicks 2015).

Some background information about social work in England is needed as context. There are approximately 95 000 social workers currently registered in England (HCPC 2016b). British social work is a degree-level profession, meaning a student must undertake at least an undergraduate degree to be able to register with the government as a social worker (DoH 2002). Previous standards allowed diploma-level qualifications, and the change to degrees raised the level of education required of students wanting to become social workers (Orme *et al.* 2009). There are 72 universities providing social work qualifying courses in England, along with seven further education institutions (Skills for Care 2016). These courses are quality assured by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), but students do not register with them during their course of study. Approximately 4,600 new social work students enrol on social work courses every year, with about 70% of students enrolled on degree-level courses, and 30% on postgraduate courses (*ibid.*). Social workers in England are registered with the HCPC, but the General Social Care Council (GSCC) previously regulated social work in England, and both will be discussed at various points of

the following thesis. The government has announced plans to create a new organisation to regulate social workers in England, removing them from the HCPC (DfE and Morgan 2016). These plans are enshrined in the *Children and Social Work Bill* 2016.

Contribution

Whilst we have some understanding of the experience of men social workers in the UK (Annison 2001; Baines *et al.* 2015; Christie 2001b; Cree 1996; Davey 2002; Gillingham 2006; Hicks 2001; Kadushin 1976; McLean 2003), the experience of men social work students is much less frequently explored, and less understood. There are only two previous studies qualitatively considering the experience of men social work students in the UK, neither of which explicitly explore any possible inter-relationship of progression and course experience (Cree 1996; Parker and Crabtree 2014). This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how men's course experience is connected with their progression.

In addition, given the scarcity of other research exploring men's experience of studying social work in England, this study seeks to improve our understanding of social work student men's experience of studying social work. It is expected that an in-depth, nuanced analysis of their accounts can be used to inform the strategies social work educators use to support men students.

This thesis also seeks to examine the boundaries identified between 'man' and 'woman' currently constructed in English social work education. By understanding men's experience and considering their responses to progression challenges, this study seeks to improve our understanding of gender norms and expectations for men.

A further aim not to be overlooked is to foreground the voices of men social work students, and to provide them a space where they could explore their experiences. This group is more usually examined through the perceptions of educators (e.g. Furness, 2012; Galley & Parrish, 2014; Lloyd & Degenhardt, 1996; Rogers, 2013); by explicitly gathering their accounts this study seeks to highlight their narratives. The interview and recruitment process allowed for a range of conversations with men about their challenges of studying social work, and it is hoped this experience would assist them in managing any difficulties.

Thesis Outline

In order to answer the research questions posed earlier, this study used interpretivist and qualitative methods to develop a thick description of English social work student men's experiences. Twenty-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with social work student men from seven different English universities. The participants were recruited to provide as diverse a range of experiences as practically possible for an independent study. Men with and without progression problems were interviewed in the hopes of understanding their experiences, as well as trying to learn what might mitigate against men's progression problems.

This thesis provides a rich and nuanced analysis of men's experiences and progression in social work education in England. It consists of eight chapters, beginning with this first introductory chapter. Chapters Two and Three contain a review of relevant literature. Chapter Two explores education, gender equality and progression generally. It focuses on educational experiences for men and boys, and outlines the context for higher education. This chapter concludes with a section about progression of other minorities in social work education (such as students with disabilities and other minorities) to see what we can learn through

the experience of these other minorities, in essence: Are these progression problems unique to gender? Chapter Three critiques current knowledge about men in social work and social work education, exploring what we know about men's progression and experience on social work courses, focussing predominantly on the UK and England. It also presents findings from a secondary analysis of GSCC quantitative data about social work student progression, provided for context as previous quantitative progression studies only considered men as one of several groups in social work education with progression issues. Chapter Four presents theories considered during the study as potentially useful to understand participant's experiences including: theories of higher education student retention; theories of gender and masculinities; and stigma theory. Chapter Five outlines the methods used in this study. Chapter Six describes the findings of themes found during the qualitative analysis of the men's accounts, and before an application of theories. These are divided into those challenges likely to be experienced by both men and women, followed by specific themes perceived to be related to men's experience. Chapter Seven discusses the findings by employing stigma theory and concepts of hegemonic masculinity, and these are used to adapt the *Student Integration Model* (Tinto 1975; 1987), adapting this model to describe the experience for some men social work students as developed from this study. These new considerations are used to provide an in-depth and nuanced understanding of men's social work student experiences and how these may relate to progression issues. The final chapter, Chapter Eight, summarises what has been learned during the present study, and identifies further areas for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: EXAMINING EDUCATION PROGRESSION, EMPLOYMENT AND GENDER

Introduction

When investigating men's progression on social work courses and seeking to understand the context for their educational experience, it seemed helpful to consider several questions: What is the general educational experience for men? Are men's progression issues unique to social work? If not, what can be learned about men's progression in other WMO? Do other minorities in social work have progression issues? How do each of these situations relate to men's experience and progression in social work education? In order to address these questions, literature from several areas are critically explored in this chapter including education, WMO and gender equality.

First the chapter appraises the literature and knowledge regarding progression and attainment of men and boys in education generally, and the wider knowledge about their views and feelings whilst in higher education more specifically. The second section discusses higher education retention, and the difficulties when attempting to compare retention internationally. Retention is explored more broadly, both from an international perspective, as well as the policies enacted to improve higher education student retention. Third, the chapter examines the gendered nature of progression and retention in higher education. Fourth is a section on gender equality and gender equality policies, used to provide context to the policy context related to gendered engagement in academic subjects. Fifth, the chapter considers men's position in women-majority occupations (WMO). Lastly, the chapter presents literature describing student progression issues for minorities other than men in social work, including Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) students.

Men and Boys in Compulsory and Higher Education

Men's and boys' experience in education is central to the topic of this thesis. Gender as a consideration has only recently entered the education literature, but has grown significantly over the last two decades (Dillabough *et al.* 2011). Exploring gender within the context of education settings now includes dedicated journals (*Gender and Education*) and academic handbooks (Skelton *et al.* 2006). This interest coincides with a vast range of policy documents from the UK (DfES 2007; HEA 2011; Bowes *et al.* 2015) and EU (OECD 2009; OECD 2015a) that explore this broadening field of inquiry. Such growth suggests that the area continues to receive ongoing attention, having previously been subjugated to a lower level of priority.

The knowledge that has been used to appraise gender and education that is of interest to this project can be broadly grouped into four categories: gender and educational attainment; boys engagement in education; the possible 'feminisation' of education; and the drive to increase the number of men in teaching, in primary and early education specifically.

A significant amount of literature has been devoted to studying gender and educational attainment in compulsory education, resulting in a great deal of evidence that shows different attainment levels between boys and girls (Younger, Warrington and McLellan 2005; DfES 2007; OECD 2015a; Sarroub and Pernicek 2016). Girls perform better at all levels of education, including GCSEs, A levels, and other examinations (Skelton 2006; OECD 2015b). There is a gap of 10 percentage points between boys and girls attaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C (Skelton, 2006), which suggests a stark contrast in their attainment levels. The gendered pattern of achievement has been a noted issue for at least the past two decades, but with increasing concern as the gap continues. This gap is often called 'boy's underachievement', but both boys and girls currently perform

better than they were previously, but girls are increasing their performance more rapidly than boys (Skelton, 2006).

Machin and McNally (2005) found that boys have performed progressively worse in GCSEs since 1969. These findings are corroborated elsewhere (Burgess *et al.* 2004; Younger *et al.* 2005b; Connolly 2006), leading Connolly (2006, p.15) to suggest that 'the effects of gender appear to be independent of those of social class and ethnicity'. In essence, boys perform more poorly than girls, regardless of class or ethnic background. The effects of social class and ethnicity also affect attainment; boys from higher class backgrounds are significantly more likely to attain a 'very good' GCSE result than girls from the lowest social class backgrounds (Connolly 2006). These effects have led to mounting concern about working class boy's poor academic attainment (Strand 2014).

Research suggests that, in education, boys and men (in comparison to women and girls): have different writing styles (as suggested above); experience more difficulty in accessing support services, and access such services less frequently; have less productive study patterns; and have higher rates of alcohol abuse (even whilst attending secondary school). There is some evidence that university men's writing patterns contain a bolder style resulting in marks that are not mid-range, but more prevalent at the extremes (Francis *et al.* 2002), since boldness in this context attracts both praise and criticism. Women and girls are suggested to write in a 'safer' manner, garnering better overall marks but fewer highest marks (Francis *et al.* 2002). Men students do not use university support services as much as women across higher education in the UK (Davis 2002; Kimmel and Davis 2011; Woodfield and Thomas 2012).

Research about boys' and men's educational achievement is a complex field that tends to focus on exploring the extent and possible reasons for the gap. A large number of studies show that boys perform significantly worse in literacy than girls

(Froschl and Sprung 2005; Sarroub and Pernicek 2016). In schools around the world, boys have been found not to work as hard as girls. They are less likely to do homework, less likely to engage in school-related work out of intrinsic motivation: ‘virtually in all countries boys and girls use their free time in distinctly different ways; and these differences have a significant impact on the skills that boys and girls acquire’ (OECD 2015a, pp.36–37). In university, men have poorer study patterns than women (Hillman and Robinson 2016), which appears unsurprising given that boys have poorer study skills than girls (OECD 2015a), meaning boys enter university possessing less productive study skills and habits than girls. In university, men spend less time studying, on average, than women (Cotton *et al.* 2015; Hillman and Robinson 2016; McGivney 2003; Saunders and Woodfield 1999). They do, however, receive more support during their education from their partner and family (McGivney 2003). There are some exceptions to this, as older men suggest feeling ‘unnecessarily burdened’ by their family and friends (Maynard and Pearsall 1994). This sense of burden is not shared by the mature woman student, and in fact, may only serve to highlight that women are required to balance these issues, and are less likely to see them as warranting description. Men also have higher rates and amounts of alcohol abuse whilst undertaking HE courses (Gill 2002; Heather *et al.* 2011). Further detail about men’s engagement in higher education will be considered below, but first this chapter now proceeds to consider literature sources that relate to the context and impact of the educational environment for boys on their levels of attainment.

Educational Environment in Compulsory Education (<18 years)

As outlined above, boys do not perform as well as girls in education. Some studies suggest the educational environment is a contributing factor to this issue for boys. Boys’ underperformance has been linked by politicians, policymakers and journalists to the ‘feminisation’ of teaching (Drudy 2010; Haywood *et al.* 2015), with concerns raised that the predominant number of women teachers affects boys’ poorer academic performance. Those who express these concerns

argue that women's influence somehow disadvantages boys and creates a setting within which it is harder for boys to progress academically (Drudy *et al.* 2005). These concerns that relate to the feminisation of teaching do not take into account the range of research identifying other reasons for boy's worse outcomes. For example, there are a growing number of studies suggesting boys may be discouraged from engaging academically because of the impact upon their developing sense of masculinity (Cobbett 2014). There are some masculinities which do not align with academic success (Connell 1989). For some boys, academic success is considered to be 'girly', and should therefore be avoided (Renold 2001), with academic success becoming tainted with homophobia (Plummer 2001). A culture of 'laddishness' might also impact upon academic achievement (Warrington *et al.* 2000; Jackson 2002). This last explanation for the gendered pattern of attainment is also supported by findings that boys are more likely to dominate teachers' time with behavioural issues, as well as asking for help with their work (Sadker 2000; Van Houtte 2004; Myhill and Jones 2006). As a result of these pressing requests for attention, and the concomitant poorer achievement results, teachers are encouraged to spend their time and attention with the boys in their class (Skelton 2006).

In response to the continued gender gap in attainment policymakers have repeatedly sought to encourage more men to become teachers. Some advocates of this drive suggest that by having more men in the classroom, boys will achieve better (Drudy 2008) because they might learn better from men as role models. However, what is actually found with regard to children's engagement with teachers is that they are able to learn from a variety of teachers, and teacher's gender is of very little importance to their achievement (Carrington *et al.* 2007). The 'men as role models' notion has the support of a wide range of enthusiasts, including the OECD (2005), who suggest men are needed as role models of positive masculinity for boys, particularly for disengaged boys. This idea has been widely challenged (Carrington and Skelton 2003; Drudy 2010; Featherstone 2015; Robb 2010; Tarrant *et al.* 2015), but is tenaciously defended, and

frequently cited. In a foreword for a recent report about the gender attainment gap, the chief executive of University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) suggested concern about the high proportion of women teachers, and a possible impact on boy's attainment:

'Many commentators, including me, have suggested that the dominance of women in the school workforce may play a role in boys' underperformance relative to girls. While this report does not find evidence to support the theory, I remain instinctively convinced that, as in any other area of life, gender imbalance will itself generate further imbalance.' (Cook, in Hillman and Robinson 2016, p.2).

There are a number of studies suggesting children do not require men to model masculinity, but that they can acquire a broad spectrum of gender understandings from both men and women. These studies suggest that the caliber of the role model is of greater importance than their gender (Carrington and Skelton 2003; Drudy 2008; Skelton *et al.* 2009; Tarrant *et al.* 2015). Whilst it is clear that there is concern for boy's poorer attainment, the responses to address it are not consistent, nor do they appear to respond to knowledge about the effect of teacher's gender on boy's achievement. What appears to be more problematic is how some boy's masculinities are constructed in opposition to educational achievement, rather than the gender profile of the teachers in their classroom.

Higher Education

Whilst the previous section about experience of boys in education is useful context for the current study, more relevant is the experience of men in higher education (HE), particularly their experience and performance within the HE sector in the UK. Numerically, more men than women have attended HE in the UK for about 800 years, with women only exceeding their number in the past fifteen or twenty years (Leathwood and Read 2008). The change in the last few decades, with men achieving less than women, has resulted in similar concerns as found for boy's compulsory primary and secondary education. This section

now proceeds to address the current changing climate for higher education in the UK and secondly describes HE retention statistics both in the UK and internationally. Thirdly, the policy context for retention and achievement in HE (in the UK, the EU, and internationally) is considered followed by an exposition of the gendered pattern of achievement and retention. Finally, some potential reasons for women's more effective progression, educational achievement and retention in HE both in the UK and abroad are considered.

The British HE context has changed dramatically over the last four decades, and any exploration of men's experience at university needs to be considered in this context. Following the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act the number of universities in the UK doubled from 46 to 112 (Morley 2002), resulting in a 100% increase in student enrolments from 900,000 to 1,800,000. Whilst the participation of both men and women increased during this period, women's participation rose more significantly than men (O'Connor *et al.* 2015). There are some writers that suggest that this gap has not resulted in significant policy change because it favours women, correcting their centuries-old reduced level of participation (Williams 2016). UCAS, however, in its end of year report (2015, p.1) suggested 'the widening gap between men and women [participating] is acting to stall progress in reducing inequality overall.' Because men were already accessing HE in higher percentages, the number of female undergraduates has increased significantly (by at least 100%) since the Robbins Report (1963) was published in the early 1960s (Morley 2002).

The statistics relating to gendered participation is inconsistent across the disciplines; women students' participation remain significantly higher in education, social sciences and the humanities, with more men enrolled on engineering and technology courses (HESA 2016a; Hillman and Robinson 2016; O'Connor *et al.* 2015; OECD 2015b; Vincent-Lancrin 2008; Woodfield 2014). There are suggestions that to improve the gender gap in HE participation, men

need to be encouraged to enroll in those subjects that have more women students (education, nursing, etc.) (Hillman and Robinson 2016), with Barone (2011, p.157) suggesting universities were ‘engines of gender inequality’ in his study across eight EU countries and thirty years. Proponents of this suggest that universities cement the gendered paths for students by siphoning men and women into different subjects. The following figure (Figure 1) outlines the most recent data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), showing how men’s and women’s enrolment differs widely by subject; with undergraduate men outnumbering women in engineering, physical and computer sciences and business studies, but showing also that undergraduate women far exceed men in social studies, ‘subjects allied to medicine’ (predominantly nursing students), education and languages.

Students studying at UK Higher Education providers by Subject area, Level of Study and Sex 2014/15

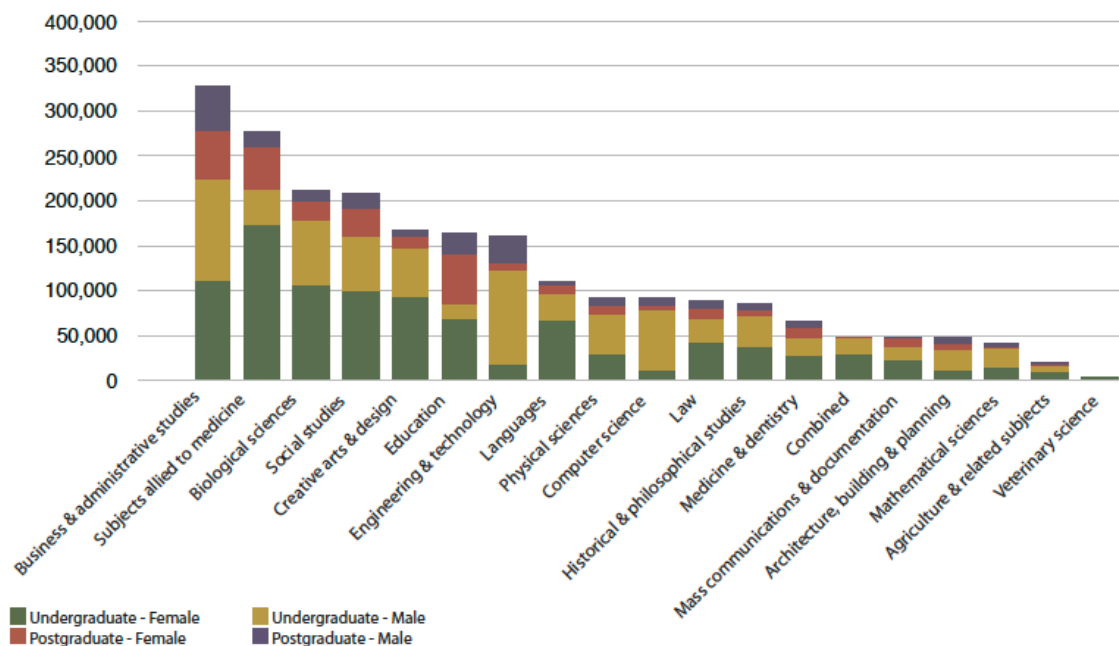


Figure 1 (from Hillman and Robinson, 2016, p. 19)

Policy makers have also expressed concerned about the gendered difference in participation by subject. Both the OECD and the Scottish Funding Council have

implemented policies that seek to address significant imbalances in the gendered rate of participation in some subjects (OECD 2015b; Scottish Funding Council 2016b). When considering the significant difference in enrolment numbers by gender, the OECD commented that: 'perceptions that some fields of education are more "suitable" for either women or men, need to be addressed if greater gender equity in education outcomes is to be achieved' (2015b, p.190). In 2016, the Scottish Funding Council announced that one of its targets was for no subject to have an 'extreme gender imbalance' by 2030, (Scottish Funding Council 2016b; Scottish Funding Council 2016a), and specifically mentioning social work as one subject requiring intervention. Whilst the present study focuses on England, policy developments in devolved governments also provide evidence of concern across the UK for the gendered pattern of subject enrolment by students.

Higher Education Retention

The last section explains the gendered nature of participation in HE, a necessary context, but this study's focus is progression and retention. As a result, the next section explores knowledge about higher education retention, which comprises a wide range of research. It is easily one of the most widely studied topics in HE over the past thirty years (Tinto 2005). International comparisons are problematic because of conflicting definitions, but also because of differences in how retention, completion and attainment data are collected and calculated (van Stolk *et al.* 2007; Buglear 2009). These discrepancies have been noticed in retention studies for decades, causing difficulties when attempting to interpret these disparately gathered (and defined) data (Cameron *et al.* 2011).

Because retention includes a wide variety of terms and lack of consistency of definition used, this variety and inconsistency causes uncertainty when comparing university student progression and persistence. Berger *et al.* (2012, p.12) suggest that there are eight terms (and definitions) commonly used in

retention literature including: attrition; dismissal; dropout; mortality; persistence; retention; stopout; and withdrawal. Retention and attrition are used more frequently than the other terms. Retention has been an issue of exploration within the UK partially because of public funding of university education and the need to demonstrate value for money and productivity. As public funding has been gradually removed, the drive for widening participation² has become a point of concern regarding retention, because of concerns that disadvantaged students struggle to complete their programmes of study more than other students (whilst also having more difficulty in even getting to university) (Strand 2014).

Even with the difficulties noted above in making direct comparisons, studies are able to find some broad consistencies across HE retention statistics. Globally, there has been an increase in numbers and diversity of students enrolling and graduating from universities (OECD 2015b). In addition, the numbers of women have increased more significantly than men (Hillman and Robinson 2016; O'Connor *et al.* 2015). Global knowledge about subject-specific retention (e.g., social work) is difficult to obtain, as studies containing national datasets collapse a number of subjects into broad categories. By collapsing these subjects into broad categories, the gendered nature of specific subjects' retention is difficult to disaggregate.

Higher Education Retention Policies

Retention and non-completion data figure heavily in HE policy quality markers and performance indicators. Non-completion is a significant consideration in the performance indicators published by HESA on their website (HESA 2016b). The previous public finance cost of student non-completion is the main driver for this

² Widening participation is a group of UK policies aimed at encouraging and assisting people from disadvantaged backgrounds to gain university education, and is included as one of the substantive policies guiding the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and HEFCE.

consideration. The annual cost of non-completion in the UK has previously been calculated at near £110 million (Buglear 2009), although this needs to be considered in the context of the lowering public contribution to university education. This cost has caused significant political scrutiny, with requests to both understand the issue better, as well as a drive to improve non-completion rates. The internal discrepancy to non-completion data described above, however, makes it difficult to create consistent policies to address this issue (Buglear 2009). Another consideration in this policy drive seeking to improve retention is the adoption of a human capital (Becker 1994) approach to HE taken within the majority of nations; this suggests one determinant of national success is the level of university education of the labour force. Nations using this may deliberately influence HE to grow their economy and global position to achieve self-sufficiency and a sustainable, skilled and well educated workforce. It also suggests concerns when expenditure on students is not reciprocated by increased labour contributions to the nation's economy.

With these issues in mind, there have been a number of policies introduced in the UK following government exploration and examination of the 'departure puzzle'. David Blunkett, former Minister for Education, for example, famously wrote to the chairman of the Higher Education Council for England (HEFCE) in 2000, requesting that the Minister 'bear down' on the 'drop out' rates of university students (particularly those students from disadvantaged backgrounds), and suggested that these rates of drop out were related to institutional rather than individual characteristics of the students (Blunkett 2000). Directly following this exchange, the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment investigated HE access and retention, and described the tension between widening participation and retention in the HE system. Whilst over 15 years ago, this level of attention generated a range of reports exploring retention (House of Commons 2001; National Audit Office 2002; Davies and Elias 2003; National Audit Office 2007; Thomas 2012) which continue to confirm that this issue remains high on the current government's policy agenda (Bowes *et al.*

2015). Retention is noted as an important part of HE policy for the vast majority of countries in the EU, with 45 per cent of countries claiming retention is high or very high for their HE policy agenda (Vossensteyn *et al.* 2015). In short, governments find the cost of student's leaving university prematurely a consistent concern and seek ways to reduce attrition and to improve retention across the entire sector.

Gender, Retention and Progression in University

Moving from a consideration of HE retention and its policy context, this next section explores the more central issue of gendered performance and retention of students within the HE sector. Across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), there are a greater number of women in higher education at all levels, with the exception of doctoral level study; but women are rapidly closing the gap in even this last remaining area (Vincent-Lancrin 2008; OECD 2012). For example, in the most recent OECD statistics, approximately 46% of women 24-35 years old possessed a higher education degree, compared to only 35% of men (OECD 2015b). North America has a similar situation, with over half of all bachelor's degrees awarded in 2009–10 awarded to women (57% in the USA), who also demonstrated higher educational attainment in every type of degree awarded (Evers *et al.* 2006; Aud *et al.* 2012). Despite these findings there is little consensus as to how to address this disparity in participation and attainment (Hillman and Robinson 2016).

It is important to note that men's engagement in HE has also increased in most countries during this period, but not as dramatically as women's, with only the UK, Austria, and Canada experiencing slight decreases in the percentages of men attending higher education (Vincent-Lancrin 2008). In fact, this issue might be more pressing in the UK than elsewhere for 'it has been estimated by some that the UK will have the second highest concentration of women in higher education by 2015, and that, by 2025, women could outnumber men 2:1' (HEA

2011, p.3). But even a slight decrease in rates of enrolment are a matter for concern, given men's position as primary wage-earners for many families, and the expectation that university education improves lifelong earnings.

In addition to more women enrolling in university, there are also gendered differences in attainment, specifically in degree classifications achieved. In the UK women comprise a higher percentage of HE students overall, and gather a higher proportion of what are considered 'good degrees' (Firsts or 2.1). These findings are replicated in a number of studies, with some broad agreement among them that women have within the past decade begun achieving better results overall across a range of subjects in HE (Leman and Mann 1999; Francis *et al.* 2002; Naderi *et al.* 2008; Sheard 2009; Thompson and Bekhradnia 2009; Woodfield 2014). These studies show a gendered pattern to achievement, but this is not consistent across the sector or between subjects. Examining the percentage of 'Firsts' awarded exclusively, the percentage of men remains higher than women (HEA 2011; Woodfield and Earl-Novell 2006). This is surprising because it is inconsistent with their performance across the education setting, and remains the only example where men demonstrate greater attainment. With the exception of this type of award, men achieve less successfully than women in all sectors, commencing in primary and secondary school, and continuing into HE (Hillman and Robinson 2016; OECD 2015a). Some explanations for this exception have been suggested, including gendered writing styles and differences in subject award concentration. Some studies suggest men use a 'bolder' writing style (Smith 2004), gaining them greater reward (and punishment) in marking (Francis *et al.* 2002). Another explanation relates to the finding that courses with a higher proportion of Firsts have a greater concentration of men, such as science and mathematics (Woodfield & Novell 2006). These findings are not undisputed, since reports also found that women achieve more Firsts than men (Smith 2004); although this finding is not replicated throughout the literature. Of note, a recent analysis of English social work student data (academic years

2009/10 – 2012/13) found that men were more likely than women to achieve a First, but women more likely to achieve a second class degree (Skills for Care 2015). These studies suggest men and women attain differently, with men more likely to achieve scores at the extremes and women a greater amount of degrees in the higher-middle range.

This dramatic shift has resulted in a large body of research investigating the existence of an international gender gap (Breen *et al.* 2010). This research coincides with a sense of ‘moral panic’ for some individuals because of the potentially disrupted place of men within society, including books such as *The End of Men: and the Rise of Women* (Rosin 2012), with corresponding newspaper headlines, predicting the end of man’s pre-eminent place in society. This new gender gap is much discussed, but as McNabb *et al.* (2002, p.499) suggests, this difference is ‘little understood’. The variance of retention data is one reason for this lack of understanding. Of note is the political focus given to student retention; universities attempt to improve retention statistics because of the financial and reputational gains associated with better retention and, in particular, the need to position themselves as high as possible in University League Tables in the UK to attract a higher number of students and thus ensure their future financial viability and sustainability.

Scholars have suggested several possible issues that affect men’s poorer performance and progression. Studies show men are more ‘disengaged’ from their university course and experience than women (Edgar 2015; Kahn *et al.* 2011; Woodfield and Thomas 2012). They attend fewer class sessions (Cotton *et al.* 2015; Woodfield and Thomas 2012) and complete fewer study hours per week (Cotton *et al.* 2015). They are also found to disengage more than women when experiencing difficulty (Edgar 2015). This pattern of disengagement is of concern because disengagement is found to relate to lower levels of progression and retention (HEA 2011). Men students also use less university academic or

personal support services than women (Cahill *et al.* 2014; Woodfield and Thomas 2012); these support services have been shown to improve student progression and retention (Jones 2008). Men are less aware of these services and use them less than women, but are also less willing to admit having problems in general (Woodfield and Thomas 2012). There is some evidence men are particularly reluctant to admit educational problems (Mark *et al.* 2010), and the HEA reported that 'male students were simply unaware that they were facing problems or at risk of failing' (2011, p.22). These studies suggest difficulties with identifying problems and admitting them, and of seeking help when issues are identified. They also show men have less connection with the course and university, and devote less time to study, increasing progression and attainment issues.

These issues are of note because universities consider student diversity to be an important indicator of success and productivity. A more diverse student population is also considered to encourage enhanced learning, particularly for students from a variety of minority groups (Lotkowski *et al.* 2004). Of particular note for this study, men are found to be significantly more likely to leave when they are enrolled on courses with high proportions of women, with 'the percentage of male leavers being highest in programmes where women made up more than 75% of the students' (Severiens and ten Dam 2012, p.461). Men are also known to leave their course for different reasons than women, such as needing to combine work and education, or concerns that they may not secure a 'good-enough' job after graduating. Interestingly, women are found to be *less* likely to drop out of courses with high proportions of men than they are of those courses where a closer gender ratio exists (Johnes and McNabb 2004; Kamphorst *et al.* 2015); showing significantly different choices than men. Men have also been found to progress better on courses that are more traditionally accepted for men, such as engineering and the applied sciences (Leman and Mann 1999; McGivney 2003). These findings, that men are more likely to leave courses that have higher percentages of women students, are of central

significance to this study, for it is reasonable to suggest a similar effect will be discovered for men social work students, as student enrolment on social work courses is significantly gendered, with men in a significant minority compared to women (Parker and Crabtree 2014; Perry and Cree 2003; Schaub 2015a; Scottish Funding Council 2016a), currently at 15 per cent of student social work enrolments.

Gender (in)Equality

When examining these contexts of gendered education, it would be useful to next consider gender, and policy aims of greater gender equality. It is necessary to consider the context of gender equality theory and policies for two reasons: one of the reasons provided to support increasing the number of men in social work is to use this increase to improve gender equality; secondly, this study's focus is on the difference experienced by students based on their gender. To adequately explore gender equality and related policies, it is important to explore both the wider context (across the EU), as well as the more local UK context, and social work's specific connection to gender equality.

Many current texts present gender equality as a *fait accompli* (Lloyd 2012). Some appear to suggest that equality has either been achieved or that it is so obviously necessary that their presentation suggests any usefulness or benefits do not require discussion. Even without a detailed appraisal of the benefits of gender equality, there are no mainstream UK politicians that state that they do not support gender equality, and there are robust policies and government legislation purporting to improve such equality (e.g., Equality Act, 2010). There are, however, several explanations that describe the negative impacts of inequality. First, inequality is seen to be transmitted from one generation to the next, limiting social mobility as a result, since 'inequality [...] acts as a barrier to social mobility'

(Hills *et al.* 2010, p.2). Second, inequality hinders the range of choices for individuals to engage in society as fully as they might. This restricts the benefits society could gain from greater equality, since individuals are not able to contribute their distinctive gifts without restriction (OECD 2015b; Pascall 2012). For example, might a woman not make a great bishop, or a man a great child-minder? Whilst both men and women undertake such roles, the gender ratio in each example is very skewed. Currently, access to these career choices is hindered (either explicitly or implicitly) to people from one or other of these genders. Third, there is ample evidence to suggest that those societies that promote greater equality of opportunity within the labour market have more economic success, that their citizens are healthier (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010) and happier (Layard 2011). Finally, the EU and the UK both have gender equality as a central tenet suggesting '[i]nequalities between women and men violate fundamental rights' (European Commission. 2011, p.8). In a speech to the United Nations, Caroline Dinenage, the British Minister for Women, Equalities & Family Justice at the time, suggested we were living in 'a critical time for gender equality' (2016). The government suggests it had a renewed focus on addressing the gender pay gap, having engaged in two recent consultations about mandatory reporting of the gender pay gap for a range of organisations (Government Equalities Office 2016a; 2016b). These statements suggest that both the EU and the UK promote gender equality as a right for each individual, which must be protected and supported through policies. However, many of the statistics relating to gender equality suggest that discernible inequality still exists. Not only do women generally earn less than men, but they also have greater home and caring responsibilities than men (Dotti Sani 2014; Yavorsky *et al.* 2015), and are much more likely to be victims of domestic violence than men (Hester 2009).

More structural forms of gender inequality exist, as well, but are often less obvious. Holter suggested structural inequality is 'rarely explored in an explicit way as a theoretical tradition in scholarship on men and masculinities' (2005, p.18). Structural forms of gender inequality include the persistent gender wage

gap and the division between public (masculine) and private (feminine) spheres, with these spheres attracting a different value for activities conducted within them (Connell and Pearse 2015). The gender wage gap persists globally despite years of policies (Blau 2016; World Economic Forum 2016), and has recently caused some women to suggest such inequalities reside also in film and television (Malkin 2016; Revesz 2016). The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been credited with bringing more attention to structural gender inequality (Parekh 2011), by placing some responsibility on nations to address these structural inequalities with continued attention.

Women are making advances into many areas of employment, but a number of work roles are still strongly associated with either men or women. The different spheres of home and workplace are significantly gendered, with women linked to home, and men to the workplace, even though both genders occupy both spheres (Beasley 2005). The workforce remains profoundly gendered, and this is 'seemingly impervious to change' (Williams and Dellinger 2010, p.1; see also Razzu 2014), and is multi-faceted with a number of intersecting and intertwining issues (Furnham and Wilson 2011). Labour undertaken by women continues to accrue less value by society than work by men (Shen-Miller and Smiler 2015). Consider the difference in societal prestige that exists, for example for a chemist when compared to a nurse; the first role carries more esteem than the second. It is postulated that gender stereotypes encourage women to be proscribed into particular roles, and restrict their ability to move into other roles (Furia 2010), which is replicated to various degrees globally (Chafetz 1990; Rittenhofer and Gatrell 2012; Williams *et al.* 2012). These stereotypes also encourage men to avoid roles associated with femininity (Hanlon 2012; Simpson 2009). Because of the definition of gender-appropriate roles, people who transgress these boundaries may be socially challenged, since the separations are socially policed (Butler 1990). This 'policing' occurs when friends and family (or the wider public) suggest that career choices outside of this gendered context are inappropriate

(Weaver-Hightower 2011). de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Greer's *The female eunuch* (1970) both famously presented critiques of the subordinate position of women, and as the 'Other'. These writers suggested that women's place in society could be questioned in order to improve their lives, and provide them with greater freedom and autonomy. These texts also suggested that by questioning these roles, gender equality could be improved.

Because of the societal inequality of women's position in the workplace, when men attempt to join work that is regarded as 'women's work', they may be castigated (Foster and Newman 2005; Weaver-Hightower 2011; Williams 1995). Indeed, one of the ways that gender inequality can be rectified is by the 'troubling' of these gender stereotypes (Butler 1990), using the softening of these gender definitions to help create a more equitable society. This 'troubling' can help to shift public opinion on appropriate gender behaviours, whether those behaviours are private or public. It can also potentially move societal expectations so that the principles governing gender behaviour are less specific, more malleable, allowing greater individuation and for more members of society to feel that they are not 'Other'. More specifically than these general societal concerns, the social work profession has a commitment to equality in general (IFSW 2014; TCSW 2012b), and to gender equality particularly (IFSW 2012; United Nations 1994). These principles extol social workers to believe that inequality experienced by women and girls is unacceptable and to practise in accordance with this belief by challenging gender inequality. With these tenets for gender equality, it becomes an expectation that social workers should work actively to reduce inequality (HCPC 2012). Because women's place in society is perceived by some to remain unequal with men's, this persistent issue has resonations for the topic at hand: that of social work student men's progression. Because of the policing of transgressions into gendered areas of work, men studying to join these 'women's professions' experience a degree of role-strain and role-ambiguity that is greater than that for women joining them.

Concerted efforts to lessen the gendered restrictions placed on individuals may benefit men on these courses because as strictures become less rigid, men may encounter less negative responses from their families and wider social connections. In addition, by 'troubling' these gender norms, the options for women also increase, since the boundaries between men's and women's choices become less distinct (Butler 2004), less 'policeable', and allow greater freedom for women to enter into the 'men's domain' (Government Equalities Office, Morgan, *et al.* 2015).

In addition, men have been suggested as being central to improving gender equality. Whilst their suggested engagement has not been met with universal approval, there are a number of avenues that have been suggested to men as ways to assist in the lessening of gender inequality. In 2015, for example, the UK government published *Men as change agents for Gender Equality*, a policy paper (Government Equalities Office, Morgan, *et al.* 2015). This paper argued that men are essential to the process of addressing gender inequality in the UK, and suggested their participation in this process had been relatively marginal to date. Earlier writers about gender equality also discussed the integral role men can play to achieve greater equality. Kristeva (1981) suggested that only men can 'trouble' their position, since they occupy more positions of power. Men are also able to use their right of access to some areas where women do not have right of entry to contribute to feminist knowledge and gender equality (Pease 2000). Kelly *et al.* (1994: 33) even suggests that women cannot know the 'content of the deliberate strategies that men and male dominated institutions use to maintain their power', suggesting men are needed to illuminate these strategies. Also, it is suggested that by helping improve gender equality, men will experience less gendered restrictions on their choices, and improve their lives (Kimmel 2005); as society becomes healthier, happier and more economically prosperous, both men and women may thereby be allowed a wider range of opportunities.

Gender Equality Policy

Current international policy development includes frequent reference to gender equality permeating the political agenda. There have been a number of policy developments from the United Nations (UN), starting in 1979 with the first adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and later with the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on CEDAW (United Nations 1979; United Nations 1995). This convention, and later enhanced declaration, places the stated desire for gender equality high on the agenda for the UN. Nations that accepted this convention are invited to return statistical reports every four years, with the aim that this will encourage consistent engagement towards greater gender equality within each country.

More locally, the European Commission (EC) has adopted gender equality as a central principle with the stated belief that gender equality is a right for all individuals (European Commission, 2011, p.8). As one route to partly decrease gender inequality, the EU introduced policies designed specifically to increase the number of men in childcare (European Commission Network on Childcare 1996), and as this role is also associated with social work (included in 'women's work'), it is useful to examine these policies here. This guidance to increase the number and percentage of men in childcare services began in the early 1980s. During this period, the EU Parliament and Commission called for change in the highly gendered provision of childcare, and sought to encourage men to have more responsibility in the care of their children (Cameron and Moss 1999). To further this work, in 1986 the EC established a network of experts to advise the EC's Equal Opportunities Unit. This network was called the European Commission Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile Employment and Family Responsibilities of Women and Men (EC Childcare Network). This network published two landmark reports: *The EC Childcare Network 1986 – 1996: a decade of achievements* (EC 1996) ; *Men as Workers*

for Children: A Discussion Paper for the EC Childcare Network (Jensen 1996). These publications suggested that the attention of the EC on increasing the number of men involved in childcare work was one way to improve gender equality, specifically by increasing the number of men engaged with nursery and early education provision. The reason for this focus on men in childcare, as the Equal Opportunities Commission has argued, is that this area remained a 'gender ghetto' and that modernisation was required to draw 'on the diverse talents of a broad cross section of men and women' (2003, p.3). These suggestions that men need to enter occupations seen as 'women's work' remained a central focus of the gender employment equality policy of the 1980s and 1990s.

UK Gender Equality Policies

In the UK, gender equality policies can be seen in the context of the above cited wider EU developments. Previous relevant UK policy developments in this context include the publication of the White Paper *Fairness for All* (DTI, 2005), which emphasises the principle of mainstreaming equality. This paper was followed with the passing of the Equality Act (2006), which mentioned gender specifically as one of seven categories of the equality strands. This act also created the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), a broad based and inclusive commission, to merge several different previously existent commissions³. In addition, this Act placed a duty on public bodies to positively promote gender equality from 2007. Subsequently the Equality Act (2010) was passed, which requires equal treatment in access to employment as well as private and public services for those who are characterised within a range of defined 'protected characteristics'. This Act also brings together a number of other, disparate, pieces of legislation that attempted to support gender equality, most particularly for women, and included extended legal requirements for

³ Commission for Racial Equality, the Equal Opportunities Commission, and the Disability Rights Commission

organisations to promote equality (Pascall 2012). These different legislative depictions suggest a continued emphasis on attempting to address gender inequality that still prevails in contemporary British society.

In addition to these contemporary examples, more recently the *Think, Act, Report* framework suggests the current government appears determined to show itself as being committed to improving gender equality in the workplace by ‘maximising female talent in the workplace’ (Government Equalities Office, Dinenage, *et al.* 2015). This framework includes a document entitled *Men as change agents for Gender Equality (ibid.)*, identifying the ways men can improve women’s engagement in the workplace. When considered alongside with previously discussed policies (such as *Mandatory Gender Pay Gap Reporting*), together these suggest that the current government purports to apply a continued focus on gender inequality.

In line with the methods suggested by the EC Childcare Network, the UK has produced policies designed to increase the number of men engaged in primary school teaching; these have resulted in an increase in the numbers of men studying to become primary school teachers (Teaching Agency 2012). Other than this recent upsurge in men seeking to become primary school teachers, these UK policies have had little or no effect on increasing the number of men in related children’s settings. For example, the UK Equal Opportunities Commission review found that the number of men in the childcare workforce has remained steady between 2% and 3%, across a range of different data sets (Rolfe 2005). The ‘childcare workforce’ includes nurseries, day care centres and childminders. The reviews undertaken on this issue have concluded that the gendered nature of this workforce is obstinately stable, despite government interventions and targeted recruiting strategies designed to increase the number of men involved in these early education or childcare settings (Rolfe 2005; Nicholson *et al.* 2008; Scottish Executive 2007; Riddell and Tett 2010).

Each of the mentioned policies embodies a continued *stated* commitment to gender equality, and of gender equality for both public and private lives. These policies and legislative frameworks have not directly translated into equality of choice for individuals regardless of their gender, since it would appear from the gendered pay difference and the gendered segregation of occupations that there still remains significant gender inequality, particularly in respect of choices for women (Alksnis *et al.* 2008). These policies have, however, stimulated positive action that has sought to raise awareness of the need to increase employment opportunities for women and to decrease the pay gap between men and women. Evidence suggests that gender equality is not yet accomplished, and some argue that one way to improve equality is by increasing men's participation in Women Majority Occupations (WMO). The benefits (or otherwise) of such initiatives have yet to be realised.

Men in Women-majority Occupations

Moving from the above broader considerations of men in education and gender inequality, the more focussed area of study relating to men in Women Majority Occupations (WMO) requires exploration. When men qualify and work in these occupations, their experience has been found to include both challenges and advantages. There is a growing body of knowledge exploring the experience of men that undertake 'women's work'. This growing body of work can be evidenced by two contrasting journals focussing on the topic of men in WMO (themed section in *International Review of Sociology*, 2013; special issue in *Sex Roles*, 2015). It is suggested by scholars who have contributed to these journals that by further examining these men and their experiences, we can help improve gender equality for women by reducing gendered notions or stereotypes of specific types of work (Shen-Miller and Smiler 2015; Simpson 2009; Williams 1993).

Similar to other socially constructed categories like class, ethnicity, culture and sexuality, gender has a complex range of factors affecting its presentation and identification. As a result of this complexity, men in WMO experience a variety of effects that have been found to include simultaneous advantage and disadvantage (Hanlon 2012; Shen-Miller and Smiler 2015; Simpson 2009; Williams 1993). The rapid rise of a recently graduated male nurse or social worker to acquire a management position is an example of a benefit (as indeed, is a swifter entry into academia); because management roles carry greater social prestige, higher wages and other benefits. This issue has been termed the 'glass escalator' (Williams 1992) given its repeated and somewhat predictable occurrence. Of equal interest is the fact that there are more men than women academics and managers in the fields of nursing (Evans 1997; Edwards *et al.* 2001; McDowell, 2015), social work (Kullberg 2013; McLean 2003) and teaching (Coleman 2009). This higher percentage of men in positions of power is a concern for some authors (McDowell 2015; McPhail 2004; Simpson 2009), because of the implication that men remain in power even when employed in occupations populated with a majority of women. Consequently, some scholars have argued that further attempts to improve gender equality by increasing the number of men joining WMOs may have a reverse effect; by increasing the number of men in WMO, they may move to positions of power more rapidly, thereby decreasing the number of women in positions with influence and power, and constitute a part of the continued occupational subjugation of women (Pease 2011).

In addition to the potential swift rise to management, studies show some men can gain advantage from joining a WMO to improve their social mobility (Ferrie *et al.* 2006; Lupton 2006). Class barriers become less pronounced once they have secured a profession-related position and a possible route into management. Working class men have also been found to use WMO as a technique to increase social standing, achieving greater earning potential and more stable wages than other occupations, making the disadvantages less significant

deterrents than the benefits that might be realised. A profession with an assured track to greater financial stability may be attractive for men who feel they need to provide financially for a family (despite the fact that the same motivators apply to women also). Also, men may select to move into management positions as a way of managing their masculinity (Christie 2006), since positions of power and management are more associated with men and masculinity than direct practice (Williams 1995).

However, men also face a number of challenges when studying these subjects and later when working in WMO. Because of the much smaller range of literature specifically focussed on men social worker's experiences (Shen-Miller and Smiler 2015), the present study also relies on a range of findings from the related fields of nursing and teaching. These professions have often been combined with social work to constitute what is called 'women's work' (Williams 1993; Shen-Miller and Smiler 2015; Simpson 2009). These other issues that relate to men's experience as social workers and studying social work are explored in more detail in the next chapter. Previous studies have found a range of issues for men in WMO: issues of isolation (Allan 1994; Beckstrom 2004; Sevier and Ashcraft 2009); disrupted masculinity (Bradley 1993; Evans and Frank 2003; O'Connor 2015); and concerns of 'dangerous' masculinity (Pringle 2001; Evans 2002). These findings suggest men must manage their gender presentation to successfully navigate WMO (McDowell 2015).

Isolation

Isolation is discussed frequently in previous related studies, with some men feeling a strong sense of isolation (Allan 1994; Beckstrom 2004; Christie 2006; Sevier and Ashcraft 2009) when working in a WMO. Men students in these fields often describe feeling as if they are alone, even though they may be surrounded by women (Cronin 2014; Isacco *et al.* 2016; Stott 2004; Weaver-Hightower 2011). This sense of isolation may prevent them from feeling able to engage in

the course fully. Some men feel isolated by the educators on their course (Stott 2004, p.91), or feel that they need to engage with other men in order to engage (Williams 1995; Smedley and Pepperell 2000). This sense of isolation and seeking to gain support from other men can create difficulties in engaging in the academic environment (Weaver-Hightower 2011). Men may feel accommodated but poorly understood within a subject discipline that is women-majority, because of 'an emphasis on emotion in the [. . .] curricula' (Dyck *et al.* 2009, p.652). This emotional content may make it more problematic for men to engage in the topics and discussion, since current constructions of hegemonic masculinity prohibit displays and engagement with emotionality for men (Connell 2005; Seidler 2005; Seidler 2007). Feeling isolated because of a minority status has also been linked to students experiencing greater progression issues (Connor *et al.* 2004).

Impacts on Masculinity

Not only do men feel isolated in these professions, but men experience impact to their gender identity when working in WMOs (Sobiraj *et al.* 2015). Some men felt that this type of work resulted in a 'spoiled identity' (Heikes 1991), 'spoiled masculinity' (Evans and Frank 2003) or 'damaged masculinity' (Bradley 1993, p.25). These issues can create a sense of masculinity under stress for some men. This concern is also present when studying WMO, when experiencing 'gendered teasing'. This teasing relates the man being potentially gay or a sexual abuser. This teasing can arise from a variety of people in the students' life (Weaver-Hightower 2011). Friends, family and brief acquaintances might sometimes make comments that are presented as innocuous and joking, but may feel pervasive and cumulative. Some people within the students' life (friends, family or acquaintances) might be seriously concerned with a man's desire to work with young children or vulnerable people. These concerns proffer apprehensions that men studying these occupations are either gay (Hicks 2001; Evans 2002; O'Connor 2015; Perry and Cree 2003) or 'sexual predators' (Cronin 2014; Harding *et al.* 2008; Sikes *et al.* 2010), both of which bring significant

social repercussions. Weaver-Hightower argues these men feel they are 'perceived as always already sexual initiators or, worse, aggressors' (2011, p.109). Men found these insinuations challenging, and these studies suggests the challenges have a negative impact on their experience.

These concerns for sexual predation may be felt most strongly for these men when touching others or showing affection (Buschmeyer 2013; Nentwich *et al.* 2013; Sargent 2005). Related studies about men studying to join WMO consistently discuss concerns with touching and caring (Foster & Newman, 2005; Hansen & Mulholland, 2005; Harding *et al.*, 2008; Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Smedley and Pepperell (2000) found that 'care' has a specifically gendered understanding for men primary school teaching students, with significant issues of risk and concern linked to physical contact and some ambiguity and uncertainty about the place of care in their professional responsibility. Men in these contexts have to make very careful decisions to restrict their contact with service users, other students and, particularly, children. When remembering that these men may wish to join WMO because of the prominence of caring in the profession's identity, the withdrawal of this section of the professional repertoire seems to be a difficult decision to manage, and one which can create a number of difficulties for students. Some of these men have made striking statements regarding the impact of this concern upon them. Sargent (2001, p.49) had a participant who stated simply: 'Women's laps are places of love. Men's are places of danger'. These studies suggest that men studying and working in WMO must, then, consider the implications of physical contact with service users, most notably children. They intimate that women who work in these settings do not think about touching to the same degree, or with as much concern or fear. In addition, these studies suggest men restrict displaying affection because they are afraid their actions could be misunderstood for sexual overtures (Buschmeyer 2013; Nentwich *et al.* 2013; Sargent 2005). This restriction can inhibit engagement for specific roles of these WMO (Buschmeyer 2013; McDowell 2015). These concerns are more prominent amongst novitiates when studying or

recently qualified, as it appears men's fears about showing care for children may lessen with ongoing experience of working in the setting (Hansen & Mulholland, 2005a, p.126).

Concerns about homosexuality or sexual predation can also be considered in relation to how they impact on individual's masculinity (Connell 2005). Some studies suggest men in WMO experience pressure from friends and family to find a 'real job', or dismay or disbelief at the choice of career. These interactions may come with veiled insults regarding the status of their career (Weaver-Hightower 2011). The type of pressure that they face can be more scathing from family and friends, but may also experienced from more general interactions with the wider society (Williams 1992). This pressure, and often disbelief, at the career choice, can make the situation difficult for some men to handle, causing some to pretend that they have different careers when engaging with people who do not know them well (Christie 2006).

Role Strain

These above issues of gendered environments and expectations have been found to create a feeling of dissonance for some men in these settings. This dissonance is found to cause role strain, noted in a number of sectors and settings. Both men and women may feel that women have a greater aptitude for WMO than men (Cree 2001; Nentwich *et al.* 2016; OECD 2015b; Okrainec 1994). This belief can be heightened by some concerns that men's place in these professions is problematic (Pringle 2001). They may experience a sense of 'going against the grain', particularly in relation to more socially proscribed presentations of masculinity (Lupton 2006; Williams 1993).

This role strain or ambiguity may be increased by conversations with the students' family and friends. Some men's family and friends think their career choice is substandard. This may even be supported by conversations with

educators that are surprised at a 'very able' man entering a caring profession (Foster and Newman 2005). There may be frequent references to these students 'wasting themselves' in a caring profession, and that they are 'too smart' for 'women's work'. If the students' friends, families and profession were less restrictive about accepted presentations of masculinity, some scholars argue there would be space for more authentic gender identities to arise (Weaver-Hightower 2011, p.113).

Men studying WMOs may undertake deliberate 'gender work' to alleviate the role strain identified above. Men studying to become teachers have been found to draw upon the discourse of the 'new man'; sensitive, parenting-oriented, egalitarian in his dealings with women, to be successful during their training and careers (Montecinos and Nielsen 2004; see also Christie 2006). These men may be reinterpreting and adding feminine characteristics in their masculine gender identity and that by implanting these 'feminisms' they create and exhibit a more flexible masculinity (Bagilhole and Cross 2006; Christie 2006; Cross and Bagilhole 2002; Evans and Frank 2003; McDowell 2015; Montecinos and Nielsen 2004). In contrast, however, instead of presenting these 'feminisms', some men students may counter such dissonance by exhibiting presentations of heightened masculinity. Weaver-Hightower (2011), Hansen and Mulholland (2005) and Foster and Newman (2005) all suggest that some men are aware of concerns of sexual predation and homosexuality and use performances of more 'appropriate' masculinity to contradict any fears of 'dangerous sexuality' (Weaver-Hightower 2011, p.109; see also Davis 2002). These 'appropriate' masculinities include an acceptance of negative stereotypes of both masculinity (e.g. the 'disciplinarian') and femininity (e.g. the 'mother-figure'), and not being 'flamboyant'. Some men students appear pleased when presented with opportunities to become 'more masculine', possibly in reaction to the particularly feminised nature of their occupations (Foster and Newman 2005). Both of these presentations, the 'new man' and heightened masculinity, are departures from the students' normal

gender presentation, and may be regarded as a deliberate choice to counter concerns.

This concern of being out of place carries over from studenthood into the workplace, as well, but may be less overt in its manifestation. Men often use a number of strategies to manage their masculine identities when working in WMO. They may seek employment in specific areas or specialties (Williams 1993; Lupton 2006; Christie 2008; Simpson 2009); redefine their work to emphasise masculine aspects of the job (Cross and Bagilhole 2002); gain promotion to become managers (Williams 1995; Christie 1998b); and may attempt to place social distance between themselves and women colleagues in an effort to maintain their presentations of masculinity (Evans and Frank 2003, p.285).

For instance, men might attempt to move into roles that have an element of urgent action required and mobilise elements of the 'hero-man' discourse into their masculine identity. For example, a man with a nursing qualification might deliberately seek posts in emergency medicine or Accident and Emergency departments of hospitals, in order to find roles that allow him to present himself as a 'hero'. The UK social work profession previously included probation, and this was a setting where this role was possible. That section of social work practice has separated from qualified social work since 1995 (Christie 1998a). Qualified social workers that are men may move into child protection, since whilst this work has a large amount of child contact, it also carries with it an expectation of rational-technical thinking, which is seen as a primary function of the 'masculine mind'. They may also move into areas of work that require less physical contact or intimate touching, since this can decrease the concerns for sexual abuse (Evans, 2002; Harding *et al.* 2008). Men also use performances of 'appropriate' (hegemonic) masculinity to contradict any fears of 'dangerous sexuality' (Williams, 1995; Sumsion, 1999; Skelton, 2003; Jones, 2007; Christie, 2006; Shen-Miller *et al.* 2011). In addition, men in WMO may feel their masculinity is

dangerous because it suggests their colleagues and service users react negatively to having a man in these spaces (Nentwich *et al.* 2013; Shen-Miller *et al.* 2011). This 'gender identity work' includes using behaviours that are both overtly masculine, or which seek to subvert the impact or perception of overt masculinity, in sometimes contradicting presentations (Evans and Frank 2003). However, when men mobilise more hegemonic masculinities, they may be unwittingly be propagating the stigma towards their own marginalised social position (Connell 2005).

Another substantial area of potential gender identity work is for men to gain positions of greater responsibility and management. As noted previously in WMO, the number of men is disproportionate within management and academia (Christie 2008; Hussein *et al.* 2016; Owen 2003; Riddell *et al.* 2006; Williams 1995) compared to the number of women in each occupation. There are a number of potential reasons suggested for this disparity: women have greater caring responsibilities outside of the workplace, which reduces their full-time employment (Leigh 2010; Williams 2010); women are less able to maintain continuous employment due to caring responsibilities and childbirth/childcare (Williams 2010; Gatrell 2011); men are more aspirational than women (Crompton and Lyonette 2008); and there are several of these factors at work inter-relationally (Williams 1993). Regardless of the potential reasons, men are found consistently in positions of management and academia, with concerns being noted about gender equality (Williams 1992; Kullberg 2013).

With this array of issues (isolation, impacts on masculinity, role strain) for men experience in WMO, men in these occupations face uncomfortable intersections between their desired professional identity and their gendered identity (Christie 2006). These intersections have been shown to result in a multi-layered set of responses, often contradictory, with swift upward movements into management, but appearing separated from some of the essential roles and tasks of the

occupation (such as showing affection and touching). These conflicting positions are not presented in sequence, or alone, but can happen concurrently, with various advantages and disadvantages for men, and noted by their colleagues.

Social Work Progression of Minorities other than Men

In order to provide further context before the next chapter considers social work and men specifically, the next section moves on to consider published knowledge about social work education progression issues for minorities other than men. British social work education progression research is a small field, with a number of frequently-cited papers by Hussein and colleagues at the *Social Care Workforce Research Unit*, King's College, University of London (Hussein, Moriarty and Manthorpe, 2005; 2009; Hussein, Moriarty, Manthorpe and Huxley, 2006; 2008; Moriarty *et al.* 2009). This means that the diversity of opinion and critical discussion is limited, something this study seeks to address. In social work, minority students are commonly considered to be students that are or have: BME; disabilities; LGBT; and men. Other research in this area has been published, but they are far less frequent or cited than the King's College works (Bernard *et al.* 2011; Liu 2016)

These studies generally suggest minority social work students have poorer progression. Hussein, Moriarty and Manthorpe (2009, p.1600) found 'students' ethnicity and self-reported disability all have significant effects on students' chances of achieving an award on time', although they found progression improved when programmes had high proportions of these minority students. Several of the studies identified practice placements as a site of particular concern for minority students (Fairtlough *et al.* 2013; Fairtlough *et al.* 2014; Liu 2016; Tadam 2014). The following outlines a range of studies considering

minority social work students, and extracts key findings related to the progression of these students.

There are very few published studies of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) student experiences in the UK, all of them qualitative (Bernard *et al.* 2014; Fairtlough *et al.* 2013; Harwood 1998), with the two most recent appearing to come from the same data source. The more recent qualitative study found that LGB students did not think their progression was affected by their experience, but three-quarters said they heard homophobic comments by other students, and were concerned by the 'relative invisibility of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the curriculum' (Fairtlough *et al.* 2013, p. 478). There are corroborating studies from the USA (Hylton 2005; Messinger 2004; Messinger 2007), and whilst these reported similar findings, they are not recent and were produced at a time when a very different policy context prevailed, so must be treated with caution.

Turning now to studies examining students with disabilities, Stanley *et al.* (2011) found students that disclosed disability status perceived greater scrutiny about their fitness to practise, but felt they received support for reasonable adjustments on placement (this study included nursing and teaching students). Concerns about fitness to practise issues for students with disabilities have also been found elsewhere (Sin and Fong 2009). Studies generally suggest social work students with declared disabilities have poorer progression than students without disabilities (Hussein *et al.* 2009; Liu 2016).

There is a small but growing body of work exploring BME social work student's educational experience. A range of studies have suggested BME students experience racism whilst studying social work (Bartoli *et al.* 2008; Bartoli 2011; Fairtlough *et al.* 2014; Masocha 2015; Tadam 2014) with Masocha (2015) suggesting it was a central focus to these students' educational experience. These studies often suggest these negative experiences as a partial explanation

for BME students' lower levels of progression that have been evidenced in other studies (Hussein *et al.* 2009). Most of these studies explored student experience of placement in more detail, but one study (Bartoli 2011) explored Black African student assessment experiences, and found that these students experience particular challenges when undertaking academic assessments on UK social work programmes, with significant impacts on marks achieved.

Lastly, a few studies suggest social work students with more than one minority identity may experience a 'cumulative disadvantage' (Bernard *et al.* 2011; Liu 2016), with these multiple minority identities resulting in increased progression barriers.

Summary

This chapter used context for the current study to help understand the wider social, policy and occupational background for men's progression in social work courses. There is consistent evidence that boys and men progress worse at every stage of education, and have poorer study habits than women and girls (e.g., completing less homework, missing more classes, more non-academic socialising), both globally and in the UK. Men are significantly more likely to leave HE courses with high percentages of women students, but the reverse is not true; on courses with low percentages of women, women students are *more likely* to stay on their course than their peers. Men are more disengaged from their universities and courses in general than women, and are likely to disengage even more when experiencing difficulty. When men qualify and work in WMO, they experience both advantage and disadvantages: they move into positions of power more quickly, and in greater numbers (known as the 'glass escalator'); but also experience significant isolation, impacts on their masculinity and role strain as men. Lastly, this review found that social work minority students (BME, students with disability, LGBT students) have poorer progression than non-minority students, and students with multiple minority identities may experience a

cumulative disadvantage, resulting in poorer progression. The question remains: are these progression problems also an issue for social work student men? If so, how do these progression issues relate to their experience? The next chapter addresses these questions, but highlights where the gaps in our understanding remain.

CHAPTER THREE: MEN'S PROGRESSION IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Introduction

Following from the detailed considerations of gender and education outlined in the previous chapter, this chapter critiques and presents literature associated with how men progress and experience social work education. Identified during this study, from reviewing previous studies about social work student progression, was that no previous study had analysed social work student data specifically for men's progression. Previous studies have examined several groups of students that perform more poorly than average; these groups include students with disabilities, BME students and men (Hussein *et al.* 2009). As a result, to comprehensively understand the context of the men's progression, this chapter also provides findings from a secondary quantitative analysis of General Social Care Council (GSCC) progression data. This data shows that men have poorer progression than women on social work courses in England, even when managing for other variables (such as ethnicity, disability or prior educational attainment).

After a contextual introduction, this chapter reviews findings from other studies exploring British social work student progression. Secondly, it presents the results from the analysis of quantitative GSCC social work student progression data for 2006-2011. Third, it presents literature about how men are constructed in social work and engage in *being* social workers, with a complex array of benefits and challenges. Fourth, it critically examines qualitative studies of social work student men's experience, suggesting their scarcity and age supports a need for further exploration of men's social work education experiences. Finally, the chapter applies progression knowledge from other contexts to inform the analysis

of this setting: findings about social work progression from other nations; and progression of men in other women-majority occupations (WMO).

In order to understand social work progression and men's experience as social work students, some further context about social work curriculum in England is required. Social work undergraduate degrees in England usually follow a full-time and three year route to qualification. Standards require two practice placements with organisations that provide services equalling 170 days total. The first placement is 70 days in year two and the third must be 100 days and contain statutory social work tasks (TCSW 2012a). It is generally assumed these placements make up roughly one-half of the time of social work degree activities, and they form an important part of the student experience. These placements involve undertaking social work-related roles usually in a team of other social workers under the supervision of practice educators. These tasks involve engaging and working with service users, members of the public needing support from the service. Practice Educators (PEs) are specially qualified practitioners trained to help the student undertake the social work tasks in the setting, and to assess their suitability to work as practitioners (TCSW 2013). These placements carry academic credits and are able to be failed.

Considering the range and variety of literature examining social workers and their experience in the social work profession, the literature considering the experience and position of men as social workers is relatively sparse. There are some notable exceptions to this oversight, beginning with the early work of Kadushin (1976) in the USA, the more recent UK work of Cree (1996), Christie (1998a; 1998b; 2001a; 2008), Hicks (2001) and Scourfield (2001a). Pease has written about men in social work both from an Australian context and applying it to a global setting (Pease 2001; Pease 2006; Pease 2015; Pease 2016). Not surprisingly, there is more written about social work's involvement with men as service users (Baynes & Holland, 2012; Featherstone, 2010; Featherstone &

Fraser, 2012; Gupta & Featherstone, 2016; Maxwell, Scourfield, Featherstone, Holland, & Tolman, 2012; Maxwell, Scourfield, Holland, Featherstone, & Lee, 2012; Scourfield & Coffey, 2002). There are far fewer studies, however, that explore the experience of men social work students. In the UK, there are only two studies about men's experiences as social work students, beginning with Cree (1996; 2001), and more recent study by Parker and Crabtree (2014; and Crabtree and Parker 2014). These suggest some interest in the position and experience of men studying to enter the profession. Generally, they suggest concern and a need for further examination of the intersections of masculinity, professional identity and gender equality. One was a single-site study (Parker and Crabtree 2014), and the other located in Scotland before the change to a degree-level social work qualification. There are some other texts that explore some potential challenges of teaching men social work students (Lloyd and Degenhardt 1996; Furness 2012), and are useful for context. These previous studies and other relevant texts will be explored in more depth below.

Progression of Social Work Student Men

The final section of Chapter Two examined findings from previous studies that examined social work student progression. These studies did not focus specifically on men and their progression, but presented men as one of several groups of students with progression problems, alongside students with disabilities and those from BME backgrounds. These studies found that men have poorer progression than women, even when managing the data for other variable effects such as ethnicity, disability and prior educational attainment (Hussein *et al.* 2005; Hussein *et al.* 2009; Hussein *et al.* 2006; Hussein *et al.* 2008; Moriarty *et al.* 2009). These studies have not considered the experience for men studying social work, as they have not explored the question qualitatively.

Other Social Work Progression Studies

Whilst these studies have not focused solely on men, their findings provide helpful context for the present study. In addition to finding that students from BME backgrounds or with a disability have greater progression issues than the general population, these studies have repeatedly found men social work students do more poorly than women (Hussein *et al.* 2005, 2009). In addition to these groups, these studies found men have a higher proportion failing, withdrawing and being referred and deferred than women. For example, when analysing data about the 2003-05 social work student cohort, a previous study found 53% of women full-time UG social work students in the UK (n = 4496 women) passed at the first attempt, while 19% deferred, 10% were referred, 15% withdrew, but only 1.7% failed (Hussein *et al.* 2009). In comparison with these progression rates, men had generally worse progression, with only 47% of men passing at first attempt (n = 774), a slightly better ratio of 18% deferred, but men had significantly higher rates of referrals (12%), withdrawal (20%), and failure (3.2%), with this last category being almost twice as high as women. This study is corroborated by other studies, with other statistical analyses of English social work student progression suggesting men as one of a number of groups with progression issues (Hussein *et al.* 2005; Hussein *et al.* 2006; Hussein *et al.* 2008). It is important to note that one of these studies (Hussein *et al.* 2008) presented findings from data gathered from 1995-1998, before the change to a degree-level profession, and the application of these findings for the current education setting must be considered in light of the potential impact for this change.

When considering these previous studies, whilst the numbers of affected men in some of these studies appear small, if the total number of men enrolled on UG courses are considered, negative implications are more readily apparent. For instance, in the most prominent study (Hussein *et al.* 2009) only 154 men withdrew compared to 661 women, but the total number of women was 4496

compared to only 774 men; clearly 154 is a much larger proportion of 774 than 661 is of 4496. When these studies compare numbers of passing and failing students, men are again found have progression issues: 361 men passed, while 25 failed; 2402 women passed, and only 78 failed. Of note for the present study, these other analyses only examined men's progression as one group alongside a range of other groups. Other demographic features have been found to be correlated with greater progression problems, most significantly disability and ethnicity (Hussein, Moriarty and Manthorpe, 2009). Hussein and colleagues found that 'men, people from black and minority ethnic groups, and people with disabilities all have lower progression rates' (2008, pp.1604–1605), including men amongst these other groups as having progression issues.

If men social work students have more progression issues than women, and social work has a commitment to equality in general (HCPC 2012; IFSW 2012), and gender equality particularly (United Nations 1994; IFSW 2012), then it follows men's progression could warrant further exploration. Surprisingly, there are no previous progression studies solely focussing on men's progression. Previous studies investigated progression for all social work students, finding progression issues for several different groups of students. In order to ensure an in-depth understanding of the progression issues this study, as an initial phase, undertook a secondary analysis of quantitative progression data, focussing on the gender difference for student progression on social work courses in England. It seeks to more comprehensively understand the progression for men students. These findings are presented in the following sections, including a brief outline of the methods used during this phase.

Secondary Analysis of GSCC Student Progression Data⁴

⁴ The results presented here have previously been published as Schaub (2015a).

These sections present findings investigating men's progression exclusively, and how it may be affected by other identity characteristics (Schaub 2015a). Quantitative data was obtained from the GSCC using a Freedom of Information request. These data were analysed using multi-variate regression modeling to determine associations between progression outcomes and student gender. The GSCC was the English social work regulator between 2001 and 2012 (GSCC 2012). When the GSCC closed, the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) assumed responsibility for regulating social workers in England. The GSCC collected national student demographic and retention data, but the HCPC does not, meaning further progression studies rely on broader HESA data instead of specific social work regulator data (Skills for Care 2015; Skills for Care 2016). Regression modeling has been used other progression studies in the field (Hussein *et al.* 2006; Hussein *et al.* 2008) supporting the use of this method for this setting. The dataset acquired was unusually reliable, as it was not a sample, but reported to contain complete data for all students attending qualifying social work courses in England between 2006-2011. Because of the dataset's complete nature, the validity of any findings originating from this data are greatly enhanced in comparison to sampled data, as there are no sampling errors inherent in the data (other than missing data-related errors). However, it is important to note the data was collected by the GSCC and intended for other purposes; as a result, its validity must be treated with the requisite caution. There are precedents of using these types of datasets to determine student progression issues, and the GSCC had a vested interest in ensuring robust data collection, given its remit as the regulator of both social workers and social work education. These interests and prior studies suggest this dataset is likely to be highly robust and suitably accurate for this type of analysis to be informative.

Methods

Multi-variable regression is a statistical analysis that allows for the results to be investigated with enough sophistication that several variables can be studied to determine their individual impact for the issue under scrutiny (Field 2000). The

analysis presented here began with uni-variable analysis, considering how the two gender categories relate to the progression issues. These progression issues were separated into pass, defer, fail, refer and withdraw. Next, using multi-variable logistic regression allowed the analysis to describe gendered progression issues, whilst managing the potential impact of these other variables. As a result, this analysis examined how men progress as compared to women. Importantly, using this type of regression was able to manage the impact of other variables on gender and progression including: ethnicity; disability; previous educational qualification; age; year of attendance; course type; and attendance route. Previous studies have not usually included such a diverse range of variables, with only one suggesting a comparative range (Hussein *et al.* 2009; 2011).

The data set contained both undergraduate and postgraduate students, with 38,038 separate incidents, 29,089 of which were undergraduate students (76%). These incidents equate to each social work student's progression experience for every academic year (from 2006 – 2011). For example, if a student progressed for three years with no issues from 2006 – 2009, the dataset would include three incidents for this student, one for each year showing 'pass'; that a student progressed each academic year. If this student progressed for two years and then withdrew, the dataset would show two incidents noting pass (2006/7 and 2007/8), and the final incident stating withdrawal (2008/09). Of primary concern for this study is the relationship between the dependent variable of progression issues (*pass, withdraw, fail, refer, and defer*), and how men and women present these categories differently. Table 1, below, presents progression results of students, divided by gender and progression for years 2006-7, 2007-8, 2008-9, 2009-10 and 2010-11.

| Progression | Women | | Men | | Total | |
|-------------------|--------|------|-------|------|--------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Passed | 18,866 | 58.6 | 3,122 | 53.5 | 21,988 | 57.8 |
| Deferral | 3,420 | 10.6 | 667 | 11.4 | 4087 | 13.5 |
| Failure | 710 | 2.2 | 174 | 3.0 | 884 | 2.3 |
| Referral | 5,272 | 16.4 | 981 | 16.8 | 6253 | 16.4 |
| Withdrawal | 3,938 | 12.2 | 888 | 15.2 | 4826 | 12.7 |
| | | | | | | |
| Total | 32,206 | 84.7 | 5832 | 15.3 | 38,038 | 100 |

Table 1 Progression results of students by gender for years 2006/7-2010/11

Results

The results from this analysis present a clear outline of student progression between 2006 and 2011. Across the years collected, men were found to comprise only 15.3% of the total population. The analysis found that men had higher proportions of each of the progression issues than women students. The progression issues are examined separately in turn below, and suggest gender relates significantly to progression for men, even when the effect of other variables is managed (such as ethnicity or disability). The multi-variable results and odds ratios for each progression issue are presented below including the calculated probability (p). What is important to note here, is that any variation in prior educational attainment would be managed by the process of multi-variable regression, and so what is shown here are the effects for men, separated from any variation in other variables, including previous educational attainment.

Referral

Men were more likely to be referred than women, but this was not statistically significant (OR 1.11, $p = .06$). Referral in this setting includes failing a module or

assessment requiring referral work, and possibly delaying progressing into the next year (although not requiring a delay).

Deferral

Men were more likely to defer than women, with the odds of deferral 15% higher for men than women (OR 1.15, $p=.02$). Deferral in this setting is usually called suspending studies, with students temporarily withdrawing from a course with an intention to return, usually in the next academic year.

Failure

Men were more likely to fail than women, multivariable analysis suggesting that the odds of failure were 60% higher for men (OR 1.60, $p<.001$). Failure in this setting refers to course failure, rather than individual module or assessment failure, and results in the student leaving the course (although they may be allowed to re-apply and undertake the course again).

Withdrawal

Men were more likely to withdraw than women, with the odds of withdrawal 47% higher for men (OR 1.47, $p<0.001$). Withdrawal in this setting refers to students leaving a course completely, with no expectation they will return at any point in the future. This is considered a final decision.

These progression results, both uni-variable and multi-variable, and the underpinning analysis, are presented in expanded outline in the table below (Table 2).

Table 2 Uni- and Multi-variable regression analysis, managing for alternative variables (age; year of attendance; ethnicity; disability; previous educational qualification; course type; and attendance route)

| Progression | Gender | Uni-variable Analysis | | Multi-variable Analysis | |
|-------------|--------|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| | | Odds Ratio (95% CI) | <i>p</i> -value | Odds Ratio (95% CI) | <i>p</i> -value |
| Deferral | Women | 1 | <0.001 | 1 | 0.02 |
| | Men | 1.18 (1.08, 1.29) | | 1.15 (1.02, 1.29) | |
| Failure | Women | 1 | <0.001 | 1 | <0.001 |
| | Men | 1.48 (1.25, 1.76) | | 1.60 (1.28, 2.01) | |
| Referral | Women | 1 | <0.001 | 1 | 0.06 |
| | Men | 1.12 (1.04, 1.22) | | 1.11 (0.99, 1.23) | |
| Withdrawal | Women | 1 | <0.001 | 1 | <0.001 |
| | Men | 1.36 (1.26, 1.48) | | 1.47 (1.32, 1.65) | |

The results presented above show that men have higher rates of each progression issue than women (referral, deferral, failure, withdrawal), when other variables are managed. Whilst men are not *significantly* more likely to be referred than women, slightly more do so (as the *p*-value is slightly greater than .05). Using Odds Ratios, statistically significant findings show that men are: 15% more likely to defer; 47% more likely to withdraw; and 60% more likely to fail than women. This shows that even when other variables (e.g. ethnicity, disability and previous educational attainment) are taken into consideration, men have statistically significant issues when compared to women in these three fields. They are significantly more likely to defer, withdraw and fail than women, and slightly more likely to be referred. The withdrawal and failure rates are striking, showing that men are significantly more likely to leave English social work courses than women. The deferral and referral rates show men have higher rates, but it is important to note these situations may not always equate to a student leaving the course at that point; they may go on to be successful and progress. These findings provide important context for this study, suggesting that

not only do men have greater progression problems than women generally, when considering course departure, men are significantly more likely to leave than women.

With the above analysis, it is important to note that Odds Ratios (OR) can sometimes inflate impact, so this effect needs to be considered. However, the probability scores of $p < 0.001$ for both 'withdrawal' and 'failure' display very strong reliability, suggesting very low probability for error. Even 'deferral' with a p value of $p < 0.02$ is better than acceptable limits (generally accepted as $p < 0.05$ (Field 2013)). The sample sizes are more than adequate for this analysis, as Long (1997) suggests samples smaller than 100 are problematic for regression modelling; each of the categories include more than 100 incidents.

Men's Experience in Social Work and Social Work Education

The above analysis shows that men have poorer progression than women when studying social work in England. As these results are quantitatively determined, what they cannot explain is how men experience social work education, and more generally how men students experience attempting to join the social work profession. To provide context to understand men's experience in social work education, the following sections present literature specifically relating to men as social workers and as students.

Men in the Social Work Profession

Men have worse progression than women, but they are on placement with, and attempting to join the social work profession. As a result, it is essential for this study to consider the experience of men in social work more generally. As social workers, studies suggest men have a conflicting array of advantages and

disadvantages. There are a number of writers that have begun to explore this arena of inquiry, highlighting some of the challenges. Some suggest that social work men may be concerned that others see them as gay (Christie, 2006; Hicks, 2001), or potential sexual predators (Fröschl 2002; Pringle 2001; Robb 2010). These concerns are also found in other WMO (Nentwich *et al.* 2016; Simpson 2009; Weaver-Hightower 2011; Williams 1993), and some of the issues arising from these concerns were explored in the previous chapter. It is important to note that social workers perform different functions than professionals in these other occupations; social work is indelibly linked with state intervention in people's lives (Dickens 2016) and, most famously in the UK, with the assessing of parenting capacity and involuntary removal of children from their parents (Featherstone, *et al.*, 2014; Hicks, 2001; Warner, 2015).

Given these above concerns, it is possible the contested position of men in social work may be a contributor to these issues. Pringle (1993; 1995; 2001) has suggested men's positions as social workers is contentious, largely because of men's violence towards children, women and other men. He also argues their position is problematic because of the disproportionate advancement of men within management, particularly senior management positions in social work organisations. What is clear from research is that men are the vast predominant abusers of others (Hearn 2001), particularly in categories of physical and sexual abuse. In Pringle's argument, one potential way of alleviating some further impacts upon those vulnerable individuals engaged with social workers would be to remove men from social work, thereby significantly reducing the possibility of further abuse. The impact, however, of removing men from working with those that are vulnerable could have far-reaching effects, for this argument suggests men are immutably unfit to be trusted to care for others. If we suggest that women can undertake any role that a man can, including previously held 'male' positions such as chief executives of global businesses, then it follows that the differences between the genders are socially created, policed and constructed (Butler 1990), not immutable or unmanageable, and it also follows men should be

able to engage in occupations which have previously been considered more suitable for women.

Pringle's argument has some basis in evidence from social work regulators, however. Men social workers are more likely than women to have a disciplinary case heard by the regulator (Furness, 2015; GSCC, 2012). Men social workers have a higher prevalence of cases involving inappropriate relationships with service users, and involving sexual activity (Furness, 2015). Even though the social work profession in England only has 22% men, studies found *more men than women* were the concerning practitioner in cases leading to deregistration (Furness, 2015; Melville-Wiseman, 2016). What is notable in relation to these findings is that even though women far outnumber men in social work, there are more men as practitioners in cases leading to professional dismissal (and these dismissals include more cases about sexual misconduct). It is unclear whether this disparity is from having more complaints made about their practice, or from more acts of misconduct.

In addition to the above serious conduct concerns, men have been found to undertake 'gender work' to facilitate their place in the WMO of social work. They have been found to use several mechanisms including: emphasising masculine aspects, or creating a 'hero man' persona; highlighting managerial or technical roles; or engaging in more collaborative, empathetic interpersonal styles, called 'gentle' or 'new man' (Baines, *et al.*, 2015; Christie, 1998, 2006). These styles of engagement have some relation to the forms found in the previous chapter suggested by researchers of other WMO men students.

After the range of the above evidence, it would be disingenuous to suggest men's experience in social work is without personal benefit, but it is important to remember there also experience some challenges. Similar to WMO, men social workers move into management and other positions of power more quickly and in

greater numbers than women (Kullberg 2013; McPhail 2004; Pease 2011). These positions of power and advantage allow men greater pay, more autonomy and more prestige than other positions. This example of the 'glass escalator' effect (Williams 1992) is found in social work, as in other WMO. These benefits have resulted in some criticism of men's place in the social work profession, suggesting they can usurp places of power for women (McPhail, 2004; Pease, 2011).

Men Entering Social Work

As described previously, the number of men in the social work profession has dropped significantly since the 1980s. The ratio diminished sharply as a result of probation being removed in 1995 from the rest of social work profession; as probation had a higher proportion of men than other social work areas (Christie 1998a). The ratio of men was as high as 35% in 1980, decreasing in 1991 to 25%, and dropping to 15% and remaining relatively steady at this lower rate since the early 2000s (Lyons *et al.* 1995; Perry and Cree 2003; Schaub 2015a). The GSCC's (2012) suggestion that the ratio of men would continue to decrease in the future is reasonable, as the most recent evaluation shows the lowest level of men in three years, 14.6% (Skills for Care 2016). These repeated analyses demonstrate that the number of men coming into social work is not increasing, and is certainly not near the ratio of more than 25%, the ratio suggested by others as supporting progression of members of a minorities (Severiens and ten Dam 2012; Scottish Funding Council 2016a).

When considering the decreasing numbers of men in the profession in England, it is, perhaps, surprising that the policy response has not been consistent in calling for more men. The two most recent reports evaluating social work education in the UK did not mention gender or the ratio of women and men in either review (Croisdale-Appleby 2014; Narey 2014), nor did they make any recommendations to increase the number of men in the profession. The HCPC's

evaluation of the approval process for social work programmes in England also failed to mention gender or the number of men on social work programmes (HCPC 2016c). There has, however, been a strong statement made by the Scottish Funding Council about subject-specific gender ratios. It has a key aim to improve gender equality by attempting to change the ratios in gendered occupations; with interventions and evaluations to increase the numbers of women in some subjects (e.g. STEM subjects), and of men in others. The subjects targeted to improve 'male underrepresentation' include social work as well as nursing and teaching (Scottish Funding Council 2016a, p.24). In addition to this national policy, on a more local level, University of Plymouth has attempted to address the lack of men social work student success with a programme called Men in Social Work (MiSW); using a group of men students, academics and service users, they meet regularly to support men students through their social work course (Brown *et al.* 2016). These various initiatives suggest concern from several quarters about the number of men in social work in England and the UK, although these concerns do not include a clear and consistent policy response.

Social work student men are less frequently examined than qualified social work men. There is only one previous study qualitatively exploring men experiences of studying social work in England (Parker and Crabtree 2014), but no previous study has qualitatively explored men's experiences and their progression. As a result, it is necessary to examine a range of texts exploring men social work students for context. An earlier study (Cree 1996) focussed on the reasons students chose to study social work, speaking to both men and women. Furness (2012) gathered PE's perceptions of student experience, with men students identified as causing concern for PEs. This study did find men were more likely to fail a placement, but did not connect this to wider progression issues. Two are single-site studies (Furness, 2012; Parker & Crabtree, 2014), and the authors recommend the findings are limited as a result. Cree's (1996) study used four sites, but was conducted in Scotland with data gathered over twenty years ago in

1996, before the introduction of degree-level qualification requirement. These issues suggest further limitations on its applicability for the present study. The most relevant study, Parker and Crabtree's study (Crabtree and Parker 2014; Parker and Crabtree 2014) recruited both current and former student men from one university as participants. Their participants described feeling excluded, as if they were in a minority, and perceived overtly negative views of men. Suggesting concern, the authors suggest:

'[I]f the [social work] profession is deemed an unwelcoming and even hostile territory for male practitioners... it would be unrealistic to hope that the dwindling numbers of male social work students will increase in the foreseeable future.' (Parker and Crabtree 2014, p.326)

These previous texts provide useful context and describe concerns for men social work students, suggesting they struggle in a number of ways. They have opened our understanding of men social work students' university experience, but they do not connect the experience to progression issues (other than the circumscribed connection by Furness (2012), as noted above). In a further search for contextual knowledge, Sheppard and Charles (2016) found gender differences (similar to the general population) when testing English social work students' personalities. They found men were less likely to experience negative feelings about themselves than women, and women were more likely to be open and empathetic towards other people. Similarly, of use in this discussion is Lloyd and Degenhardt's (1996) chapter describing several issues they found as educators when teaching men social work students. They present men as having more challenges when studying, and outline some potential strategies to address these. This study is able to develop from the knowledge provided by these previous studies and texts.

What can be learnt from these previous studies is that many men appear to have challenges when studying social work. Furness' (2012) study suggested men's previous positions of authority might create challenges when they transitioned into being students, and men more often reacted defensively than women

students. Cree (1996; 2001) found the men in her study frequently discussed close relationships with their mother, and described a wider variety of employment than women participants. The men in her study believed they were more likely to be promoted, and they widely discussed 'feeling different in adolescence/young adulthood from their male peers' (Cree 1996, p.82). She argues these findings suggest that men and women's experience in social work is very different. The most recent study about men's experience (Crabtree and Parker 2014; Parker and Crabtree 2014) described the men in their study as 'vibrating between positions of marginalisation and privilege' (Crabtree and Parker, 2014: pg. 7). They suggest the participants described challenges such as sexist statements about men and course approaches that facilitated women, but also feelings of development as a result of succeeding on the course. These studies can be useful as contextual knowledge, but the findings should be treated with caution for the reasons outlined above. We have some knowledge from these few studies, but the experiences of English social work student men is not comprehensively explored across a number of sites; nor, particularly, is how their experience may relate to men's progression difficulties.

These various studies provide some knowledge, but significant gaps remain about our understanding of the experiences of English social work student men. We do not know how men's experiences may relate to poorer course progression. We do not have a comprehensive exploration of how they experience these progression issues. We do not understand if men from different courses describe significantly different experiences. The next section presents findings from international literature of use for the present study.

Men's Progression in Social Work Education in Other Countries

The low number of men in social work has been identified as a concern in both

the USA and Australia (Center for Workforce Studies 2006; Gibbons *et al.* 2007; Schilling *et al.* 2008). In the USA, the Center for Workforce Studies (CWS; part of National Association of Social Workers (NASW)) have stated concerns about the growing number of women in social work, suggesting '[s]ocial work clearly is not drawing young entrants who are men' (Center for Workforce Studies 2006, p.13). They find similar concerns as the GSCC report outlined above (2012), that the number of men in the profession is likely to decrease over time because a high proportion of men in social work are close to retirement age. The age of men in the profession combined with a lower percentage of men seeking social work qualifications is leading to a profession with increasing numbers of women in the USA. Hall (2011) even suggests social work in the USA requires 'de-feminisation' to improve engagement with black young men. Giesler and Beadlescomb (2015) investigated the amount and position of men in social work textbooks, and suggested the rarity of examples of men shows little understanding that men and women may need to practice differently. They suggest men are 'erased' from social work texts, with a resulting oversimplification of the impact of gender on social work practice. These various appeals suggest a growing concern with the decreasing gender diversity of the social work workforce, and a desire to attempt to increase the number of men in the profession.

Comparing retention for social work education internationally is not a straightforward task, as this type of comparison involves the same issues noted in the retention section in Chapter Two. The issues of different recording mechanisms noted above are also relevant at the subject level. In addition, some countries do not gather national data on student progression. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredits USA social work programmes, but only collects participation rates, not progression (CSWE 2015). There have been no national-scale quantitative studies investigating potential progression issues and characteristics for social work students found elsewhere in the world. There have been some local studies in Israel, Australia and the USA (Gibbons *et al.* 2007; Giesler, 2013; Levinger & Segev, 2016). Australian (Gibbons *et al.* 2007) and

USA (Giesler, 2013) studies have recommended social work courses do more to support men social work students, and an Israeli study found men on a single social work course were statistically less likely to complete their social work course (Levinger and Segev 2016). Without studies exploring progression more widely, this issue is less comprehensively understood than in the UK because of a number of studies investigating this issue (e.g. Hussein *et al.* 2009). What these various studies have in common, however, are findings that men have more progression problems than women on social work programmes in a number of countries; and they also include a variety of suggestions as to how to address this, because each study also suggests a desire to increase the number of men in the social work profession.

It would seem logical that to increase the number of men in the profession requires some intervention in social work programmes. This seems particularly apposite currently because the number of men in the profession is likely to decrease because of the higher proportion of older men in social work in England (GSCC 2012). Three different international authors suggest men need particular support to encourage and retain them on social work programmes (Giesler 2013; Gibbons *et al.* 2007; Rogers 2013). Two used data exploring men social work student's experience (Giesler 2013; Gibbons *et al.* 2007), but all recommend using mentoring to support men social work students. Giesler (2013) found men students experience interlocking challenges and benefits including: distance from other men on the course, reticence in class discussions, connection to women students, and that they were perceived to have privileged roles whilst on placement. In the USA, there is an example of a group supporting social work student men; the University of Southern California (USC) social work department developed a 'Men in Social Work Caucus' (USC n.d.), which has a mission to support men students and raise awareness of issues for men service users. It is striking that, separately, two social work programmes in both the USA and UK developed groups to support social work student men (University of Plymouth and University of Southern California). These mentoring groups have not been

examined for any impact (from any available literature), so any wider application must be considered cautiously. These findings and programmes offer further perspectives, but have limited scope and application. They suggest men experience both advantages and disadvantages when studying social work, with some educators attempting to find interventions to support men, and possible concerns about an increasingly women-majority occupation. Their small sample sizes and single-site specificity suggest these studies have some limitations.

Looking more broadly, some studies have found differences in the way men and women social work students discuss and engage in class discussions (de Lange 1995; Hyde and Deal 2003; Krill 1992). These studies find men often describe feeling discrimination during class discussions (Hyde and Deal 2003; Krill 1992), are more likely to be assertive and less likely to appear collaborative in their communication style (Hyde and Deal 2003). These studies support findings found by others that men and women students, including those in the UK, have different social work course experiences (Cree, 1996; Gibbons *et al.* 2007; Giesler, 2013; Parker & Crabtree, 2014).

Men's Progression on Similar Courses

Given the above outlined paucity of directly applicable studies, which present a consistent but incomplete picture of men social work student course progression and experiences, the wider contextual literature about progression of men in related courses (such as nursing and primary school teaching) will provide useful further context. As described in the previous chapter, professions with more women (*i.e.* social work, nursing, primary school teaching) are often grouped together to examine experiences of men who undertake 'women's work' (Williams 1991; Simpson 2009). The final section of this chapter explores men's progression issues on those related courses. Nursing and primary school

teaching are used because of their association with social work; both are considered 'caring professions', require undergraduate qualifications, are practice-based, and have more women studying and qualified in the profession, and their widespread connection in the literature (e.g., Christie, 2006; Hussein *et al.* 2005; Simpson, 2009; Williams, 1992). Men in nursing education will be presented first, and then men undertaking initial teacher training (ITT) for primary school education.

British research into nursing student retention finds progression issues existing for men students (Muldoon & Reilly 2003; Anionwu *et al.* 2005; Mulholland *et al.* 2008; Pryjmachuk *et al.* 2008). Men students are found to be *twice* as likely as female students to be removed from nursing courses (this removal covers both issues of poor practice and academic performance). Men are more likely to withdraw from their course, as well as other forms of attrition (Dyck *et al.*, 2009; McLaughlin *et al.*, 2010). What is interesting about these findings is that they are often accompanied by a lack of surprise for this gendered attrition, suggesting this problem is widely accepted as understood in the profession, and is more widespread or deeply embedded than is explored. Much of the nursing literature suggests men progress worse in nursing courses (Johnson, *et al.* 1984; McLaughlin, Muldoon and Moutray, 2010; Poliafico, 1998; Stott, 2004, 2007; Villeneuve, 1994), with similar international findings in Australia (Stott 2004; 2007), and from the United States (Jeffreys 2007; Robertson *et al.* 2010). Stott (2004), writing from an Australian context for a wider, global, audience found evidence that between 40% and 50% of men on nursing programmes either withdraw or fail. Whilst the attrition of men from nursing courses is relatively well identified, the literature exploring the underlying issues is relatively sparse, and calls for further examination to better understand the issue (Stott 2004). In the past five years, two systematic reviews found gender was not a consistent factor in nursing student retention (Chan *et al.* 2014; Dante *et al.* 2013), but this must be considered in the context of other studies which continue to find men nursing

students' experiences of isolation and marginalisation during their course (Christensen and Knight 2014; Sedgwick and Kellett 2015).

Similar to the experience of nursing student men, there is evidence that men fail and withdraw more from ITT primary school courses in England (Szwed 2010; Warwick *et al.* 2012). There is also a range of scholars who suggest a concern for the number of men teachers, particularly in early years or primary school education (Heikkilä and Hellman 2016; Mistry and Sood 2015; Warwick *et al.* 2012). The Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) was formerly a part of the British Department of Education and established and managed the education and ongoing training for teachers in England until 2012. The TDA conducted two reviews of teacher recruitment and training (Edmonds *et al.* 2002; Bielby *et al.* 2007) both describing a need for increased recruitment of men to teach primary school, and a noted issue for men to successfully complete their ITT with primary school emphasis. In fact, the TDA, in one paper (Bielby *et al.* 2007) suggested that increasing the number of men primary school teachers was as significant an issue as other types of diversity (*i.e.*, disabilities and teachers from BME backgrounds). Again, these issues do not seem to be exclusively British, with concerns noted in Australia (Mills *et al.* 2004), the USA (Cunningham and Watson 2002), and Ireland (Drudy *et al.* 2005). There are a number of studies outlining men students experiences of marginalisation in ITT (Bhana and Moosa 2016; Heikkilä and Hellman 2016; Mistry and Sood 2015; Weaver-Hightower 2011), but there are some indications that they also experience a complicated array of advantage and disadvantage (Tucker 2015), similar to what has been described for some men in social work education. This literature generally suggests that men's experience on these courses has an impact on their progression and retention.

Summary

This chapter investigated literature about men in social work and in social work education. Using GSCC data, previous quantitative studies' findings are confirmed and developed; when considered collectively, studies show men social work students in England have poorer progression than women. Literature about these men's student experiences is more limited, and leave some gaps when applied to the current context of English and degree-level education. Most are over 15 years old and single-site studies. Nevertheless, these studies suggest men social work students describe a complex array of benefits and barriers during their course experience. A further complication for men's experience is their position in the profession; men's position in social work is often described as 'contested' for two reasons: they are the predominant abusers of other people; and when working as social workers, they more quickly achieve positions of power. Complementing this concern, men social workers are *numerically* more likely to be struck off for sexual or relationship issues by the professional regulator; a surprising finding, given the significantly lower proportion of men in the social work profession. The low number of men in social work has been identified internationally as a concern, with calls from several different countries for ways to support men into social work. There are examples of programmes that use mentoring programmes specifically to support men to remain on the course, but these have not been robustly examined for any impact. Using knowledge from courses for comparable professions, both nursing courses and initial teacher training (ITT) have found men progress poorly in comparison to women in the UK. There is a wide range of literature in both literatures discussing the issue, the experience of men students, and suggesting ways to increase the number of men in the profession.

Even with the range of studies examined in this chapter, gaps in our understanding remain. Specifically, we do not know how men's experiences may relate to poorer course progression in social work. We do not have a

comprehensive exploration of how they experience these progression issues. We do not understand if men from different courses describe significantly different experiences. In order to provide further context to understand these men's experiences, the next chapter outlines relevant theories, including theories about student retention, gender and stigma, some of which will be applied after data gathering to illuminate the findings from this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEORIES OF STIGMA, GENDER AND RETENTION

Introduction

This chapter considers theories from education, sociology and gender disciplines, with an expectation that they can be used to help understand the progression experience of men social work students found in this study. Previous chapters presented a range of literature and a quantitative analysis that showed men do not progress as well as women social work students. These chapters also identified gaps in knowledge, specifically that we do not understand *why* men have worse progression. The present study seeks to address this gap. A wide range of theories from a number of disciplines was considered during the study design and literature phases. Because a number of them could have been useful, it was necessary to explore each in turn, and determine what could be learnt about men's progression in social work courses.

The chapter starts with a brief statement situating the study in feminist theory. Secondly, higher education retention theories are presented and critiqued. Because these are generally constructed as gender-neutral, it was useful to next consider theories of gender, so gender and masculinity theories are then described and critiqued. These theories are often depicted without considering the impact of institutions on actors, so Goffman's work was the next consideration. As a result, Goffman's theory of stigma (1963) is outlined, including some theoretical developments of use for this study. Finally, this chapter concludes with a description of how the theories may be used in conjunction to help understand some potential issues men social work students' experience.

This study examines social work student men's progression, with men's gender being a large component of consideration. Given this scope, it is useful to consider how this study relates to gender equality. Whitehead (1996) suggests that men social science researchers should ensure their work does not increase gender inequality. This requires this study remain focussed on destabilising power-infused gender relations. Kristeva (1981), the renowned feminist philosopher, suggested that only *men* can jeopardise their position, since they occupy positions of power. Using her thinking, men are well placed to critique their positions of power, because they have better access to 'male zones'. This suggests the gender of both researcher and participants as useful critics of gender relations. In agreement with these ideas, this work is situated within critical studies on men (Hearn 1998; Pease 2000; Collinson & Hearn 2000; Hearn *et al.* 2002) and mobilises some feminist theories to understand the issue. For example, a man researching men using feminist theories is not a direct or simple process. One method of working within this space of dissonance is to use a critical pro-feminist lens. A pro-feminist men's standpoint however involves criticality for men's privileged societal positions and considers how those privileges assist in continued gender inequality, but this standpoint also requires a commitment to destabilise inequality (May 1998; Pease 2006). The use of feminist theory, and a commitment to ensuring its position within the research process is suggested as one element to consider when undertaking feminist research (Hesse-Biber 2011). Given the prominence given to feminist theories in this chapter (Pease, 2000; West & Zimmerman, 1987), and its consideration of gender boundaries, it seems plausible therefore to suggest that this study, by appropriating feminist theories to inform its theoretical lens, is undertaking pro-feminist research.

Even with the above positioning, in a study exploring men's progression, no matter the setting, it seemed appropriate to initially consider theories of student progression as a potential lens through which to understand this phenomenon. As a result, university student progression theories (more usually called

retention) was explored comprehensively, attempting to determine those models with the most coherence for this study. Theories of gender and stigma were then later considered to also help explain men's experience and progression issues. It seemed necessary to consider these theories in conjunction to understand the findings from interviews, presented in Chapter Six. As a result, the below sections begin with a presentation of theories of university student retention.

Models of Student Retention

Given the study's focus on student progression, it is necessary to consider whether retention theories could help explain the findings emerging from the present study. A number of models have been developed to explain university student retention. Losing students from universities has been called the 'departure puzzle' (Braxton 2000), and has been examined for a period exceeding more than seventy years, beginning with early studies in the USA. Student retention is often suggested to be influenced by a 'complex set of interactions among personal and institutional factors as well as [...] the outcome of the successful match between the student and the institution' (Cabrera *et al.* 1992, p.158). As a result of this complexity, a number of theories have been postulated in an attempt to explain retention, to help universities and policy makers increase student resilience, because of the significant financial implications of student attrition described in Chapter Two. The following section describes several retention theories, beginning with the early work of Spady (1970) and Astin (1964; 1975), and Bean's Student Attrition Model (SAM) (1980; 1990). This section concludes with the most prevalent theory presented within the literature, Tinto's primarily sociological theory of student integration (1975; 1987).

Early Retention Theories

A seminal retention theory text⁵ is Spady's '*Dropouts from Higher Education: An interdisciplinary review and synthesis*' (1970). Using Durkheim's (1897) model of suicide as a basis, Spady suggested five variables of note: academic potential, normative congruence, grade performance, intellectual development, and friendship support. He suggested that these variables are affected significantly by family background and are influential in determining the success of students' social integration. In his theory, retention could be explained as 'an interaction between the individual student and his particular college environment in which his attributes (*i.e.*, dispositions, interests, attitudes and skills) are exposed to influences, expectations, and demands from a variety of sources (including courses, faculty members, administrators, and peers)' (Spady 1970, p.77). Spady argues that these interactions either encourage or discourage the student to assimilate into the social and academic systems of the institution. Of note for the present study, he suggested that academic performance was the primary issue affecting student retention and dropout (McClanahan 2004).

Astin (1964; 1975) also developed an early retention theory attempting to explain HE student departure. His theory was developmental and suggested the involvement of students in the university affected retention. His definition of student involvement related to 'the amount of physical and psychological energy a student devotes to the academic experience' (Astin 1984, p.297). His later work (Astin 1993) suggested three areas for such 'involvement': academic interactions with faculty, with peers, and with peers who were also students. He suggested that the most influential factor relating to student retention was the commitment of faculty to the student, and that retention could be improved with increased attention being given to individual students by staff members. He thought that the

⁵ There are earlier, more tentative works which suggested a burgeoning interest in the retention of higher education students such as Summerskill (1962), Knoell (1966), and Marsh (1966). Spady's work draws upon these earlier texts to develop his ideas.

‘effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement’ (Astin 1984, p.519).

The final two theories presented below are often juxtaposed in texts in an attempt to suggest which is the most useful (e.g. Hossler 1984; Cabrera *et al.* 1992). These two theories are the *Student Attrition Model* (Bean 1980; 1990; Bean and Eaton 2001), and the *Student Integration Model* (Tinto 1975; 1987). Hossler (1984) notes that these models possess a number of commonalities. They both suggest that a complex set of interactions between student and university take place over time affecting student persistence and retention. Both theories also agree that the personal characteristics that students possess before entering university are influential to their later assimilation into university (or non-assimilation). They both suggest that the ‘match’ between student and university affects persistence (Cabrera *et al.* 1992). The below examines them in turn, including critiques of each.

Student Attrition Model

Bean developed a causal model of student departure (1980; 1990), adapting a model of employee turnover in organisational studies. Later, in collaboration with Eaton (Bean and Eaton 2001), this model was expanded to include psychological theories, with a suggestion that previous sociological theories of retention failed to include reference to a psychological framework. Their resultant Student Attrition Model (SAM) urges attention to psychological processes of academic and social integration that might affect retention. SAM suggests that intentions are shaped by beliefs that shape attitudes and in a cycle, shape intents. These beliefs are affected by encounters with various parts of the university (such as courses, friends, and faculty). Importantly, SAM ‘emphasizes the role factors external to the institution play in affecting attitudes and decisions’ and persistence (Cabrera *et al.* 1992, p.145). In essence, SAM explains retention as

a combination of both social and psychological processes. Tinto's model, however, explains retention as being primarily affected by the student's integration into the social and academic spheres. The former is a predominantly psychological theory of student attrition, and the latter is primarily sociological depiction of student departure.

Student Integration Model

Tinto's (1975; 1987) model of student interactions is often cited as the pre-eminent theory in retention literature, with a broader application and distribution than the other theories noted here (Braxton 2000). Tinto devised the Student Integration Model (SIM) in 1975 (revised in 1987, further in 1993). Following on from Spady (1970), Tinto also used Durkheim's (1897) suicide theory as a base. Tinto attempted to show that dropping out of university was similar to 'dropping out' of life. Durkheim suggested a person that committed suicide did so because of a lack of societal integration. Tinto suggested a student was more likely to drop out of university if they were not integrated in two primary university experience areas: academic and social spheres. An over-involvement in either of these spheres causes difficulty for the overall likelihood of continuing. Essentially, a student that is over-involved in their social sphere would be more likely to struggle to remain at university and, similarly, a student that is over-invested in their academic sphere would be more socially isolated, and more likely to struggle to persist to graduation. Tinto broadened Durkheim's theory when relating it to student attrition by suggesting that individual characteristics have an impact upon decisions to stay or leave university.

The Student Integration Model combines a student's entry characteristics with their commitment to the institution and graduation (called goal and institutional commitment), suggesting these characteristics and commitment impact a student's retention. In this model, the argument suggests student 'attrition results from interactions between a student and his or her educational environment'

(Cabrera *et al.* 1992, p.144). Tinto developed a longitudinal model (see Figure 2 below) explaining how different processes might influence a student to leave university but also, importantly, how these processes interact to encourage student departure. Tinto aimed to show that there are different reasons for different types of leaving behaviour. Prior to Tinto, the different types of leaving were often grouped under the single term 'dropout'. He suggested that different types of students (and different types of institutions) most likely required different types of retention interventions (McClanahan 2004). Interestingly, in contrast with Spady (1970), Tinto (1982) found the students that persist with their studies are not always those that are most able academically.

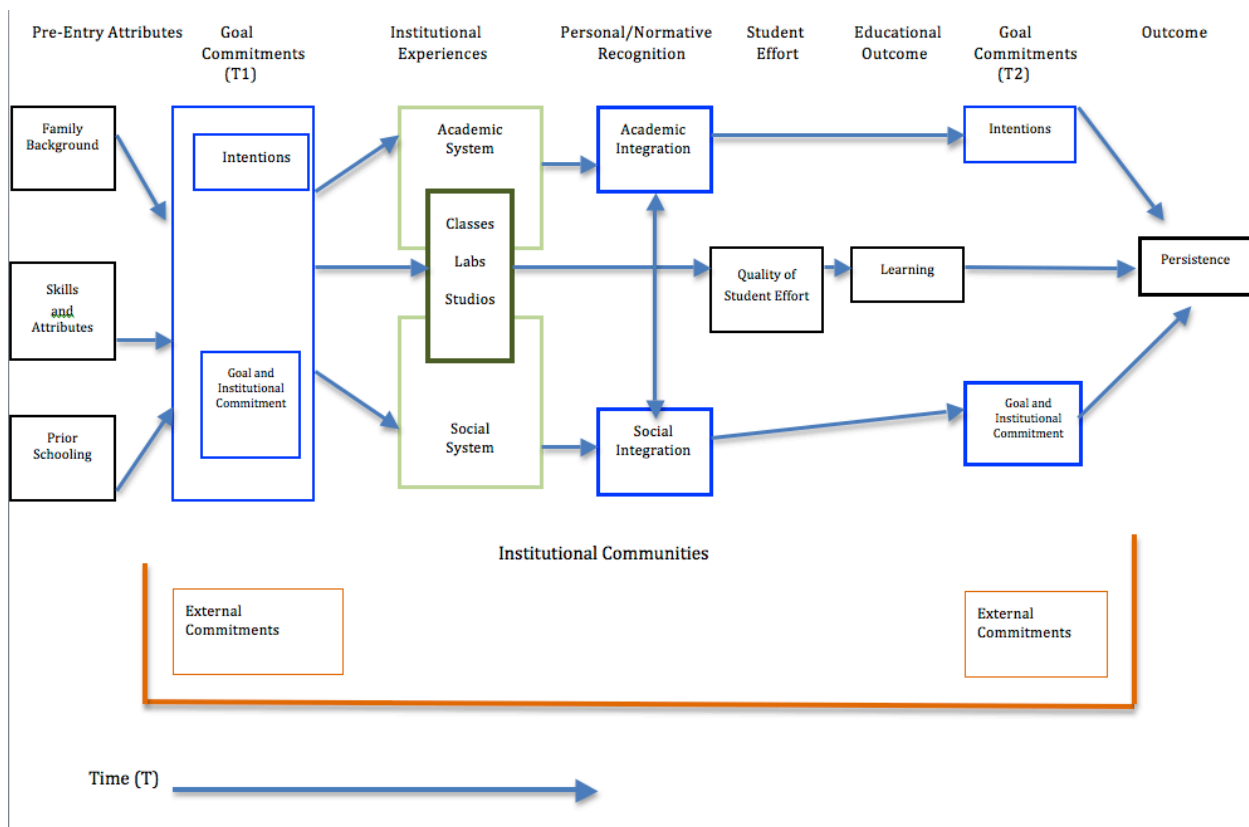


Figure 2 Student Integration Model (from Tinto 1997)

A number of critiques of have been presented regarding Tinto's model. The most prevalent concern noted is that it was designed using research upon, and is therefore more relevant for, traditional higher education students (Lundberg 2003); these students were predominantly white, middle-class student men that

began residential university education at the age of eighteen, a profile that is becoming increasingly less prevalent. As a result, critics have suggested this basis means the model is unsound, and will struggle to explain the majority of reasons for student departure (Brunsden *et al.* 2000). Brunsden (2000, p.307) argued that a model is required that is less focused on organisational influences, where 'the focus of attrition research should fall, not only upon generic factors, but on the meaning these factors have for the individual.' These various critiques agree that Tinto's theory is too focused on the university, and less on the influence of individual experiences and personal characteristics.

In response to these critiques of his work, Tinto later made adjustments to his original theory. Specifically, in later work (Tinto 1987), he incorporated Van Gennep's (1960) 'rites of passage' model. This addition included the impact of the student's ability to transition from their previous connections, and accounted for how these transitions might affect their ability to integrate into the two areas of academic and social spheres noted by Tinto as important. A meta-analysis of different studies applying Tinto's original theory (Tinto 1975) in the USA found empirical support for a number of Tinto's propositions (Braxton *et al.* 1997). The impact of student's pre-entry characteristics upon their initial institutional commitment was found to have strong empirical support. These findings suggest these characteristics affect institutional commitment throughout their course, consistently increasing the chances of student departure. There are a number of Tinto's other propositions that receive some empirical support, such as his suggestion that the level of academic or social integration also affects student's institutional commitment (and their subsequent institutional commitment). This is identified later in this study as *disengagement*. Braxton and his colleagues are cautious in their findings and have gone on to suggest that further work on this theory is needed to apply it to different settings and populations to further refine it (Braxton *et al.* 2004).

In the *Student Integration Model* 'institutional experiences' are central to the decision to leave university. Tinto suggests that '[v]oluntary departure appears to be the result more of what goes on after entry to the institution than of what may have occurred beforehand' (1993, p.82). In this model, a number of experiences usually precede student departure. Primary to these experiences is the concept of poor student integration arising for reason of local difficulties adjusting, social isolation and academic problems, as well as external factors such as family or financial concerns (Roberts 2012). As a result, the issue of integration is central to student decision for staying or leaving a university. In Tinto's model, academic integration consists of structural and normative dimensions. Structural integration entails the meeting of university standards, and normative integration pertains to the student's identification with the institutional beliefs and values (Tinto 1975).

It seems axiomatic that the experiences a student has on their course are likely to have a serious effect on whether they remain with or leave a course. Tinto argues that:

'Positive experiences—that is, integrative ones—reinforce persistence through their impact upon heightened intentions and commitments both to the goal of college completion and the institution in which the person finds him/herself. Negative or malintegrative experiences serve to weaken intentions and commitments, especially commitment to the institution, and thereby enhance the likelihood of leaving.'
(Tinto 1993, p.115)

Of particular interest for the present study is the relationship that exists between academic integration, social integration and their resultant combined impact on a student's commitment to the goal of completing their course. As a result, the gendered nature of the student's experience (as noted in the earlier part of this chapter) may be a significant contributing factor to the student's persistence to graduation. Reason (2009, p.487) suggests that retention research 'must be inclusive of as many variables and interactions as possible in order to fully understand retention issues.' To further complicate this inclusion, Pascarella & Terenzini (1998) argue the improving diversity of the HE student population

increases the interactional effects of variables for retention research. As noted above, Tinto's theory appears to provide some potential explanations that have relevance for the present study. According to SIM a man on a course alongside many more women, with family and friends suggesting a 'lack of fit' (Tinto would call this 'malintegration'), these issues would have an impact on the student's goal commitment, and they would combine to make him more likely to leave his course (for a variety of reasons). His consideration of pre-entry characteristics are also useful because, as seen in Chapter Two, men enter university courses with poorer study skills than women. The interplay of students' integration to their goal commitment is a useful concept when considering men's potential for greater disengagement from the university. Tinto has also (2006) suggested that earlier retention studies lacked a concentration of 'atypical' students, with a need for further research exploring these interactions of gender, race and other variables. Despite these challenges SIM retains currency, with a range of recent studies applying it to the current university context (Angulo-Ruiz and Pergelova 2013; Duarte *et al.* 2014; Holden 2016; Rubin and Wright 2015).

These theories of student retention are almost exclusively presented as gender-neutral, and appear to treat men and women (and, indeed, most different subjects) as homogenous. As a result, it seems useful next to outline how theories of gender, and masculinity in particular, could be used with these retention theories to help understand men's progression issues on social work courses.

Theories of Gender

Gender has been described as 'slippery' (Cameron *et al.* 1999) 'relational' (Connell 1987) and as a 'malleable' construct (Hall 1996). Each of these descriptions suggest that gender is hard to define, and is contextually

determined. Because of the present study's consideration of men's assimilation into the profession of social work, it seemed useful to consider theories about gender and employment. Two theories are widely used to review the interplay of gender and the workplace: Kanter's theory of organisational tokens (1977); and Acker's gendered organisation theory (1990). These early theories are predominantly used in relation to women's positions within the workplace, so their applicability here is limited, and found to be problematic.

Kanter's (1977) tokenism theory has been used widely by researchers when exploring the experiences of minority groups (particularly women) within an organisation (Young *et al.* 1980; Rustad 1982; Floge and Merrill 1986). This theory posits that when any group comprises less than 15 per cent of an organisation, the members of that group experience specific forms of 'perceptual tendencies': heightened visibility, isolation and contrast (Kanter 1977, pp.210–211); as well as being grouped into gender-stereotyped roles. The heightened visibility increases pressure for the 'tokens' to perform well; the isolation removes them from the informal social and professional networks, hindering their advancement; and the contrast (also called boundary heightening) increases the seeming difference in them from their non-minority peers. This theory has drawn criticism for its over-reliance on the numerical ratio of the minority (Yoder 1991; Yoder 1994) and its simplicity (Stichman *et al.* 2010). While it is useful as a conceptual frame, Kanter's tokenism theory has also been discounted when researching the area of men in WMO as not indicative of men 'tokens' experience (Williams 1992; Simpson 2009). When men work within WMO, they often experience organisational *benefits* from being a token (Williams 1995; Christie 1998a; Simpson 2009), as well as some of the challenges noted above. Men are promoted more quickly and take up positions of greater authority and power within these organisations. These benefits suggest that whilst this theory has continued applicability for the experience of some minority tokens (such as women or ethnic minorities), it is less explanatory for the experience of men (and other groups that experience majority status elsewhere).

Acker's gendered organisation theory (1990) is popular when researching the impact of gender upon people's work experiences. Acker (1998, p.3) has argued that the gendered segregation of workplaces is 'one of the most important and enduring aspects of labour markets around the world'. This theory suggests that organisations are constructed along gendered lines and this creates both benefits and detriments to the actors within them. Acker suggests that there are elements of 'exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity' that are represented in identifiable patterns within organisations (1990, p.146). The theory of gendered organisations supposes five 'interacting processes': 1) construction of divisions along lines of gender; 2) construction of symbols and images that explain or support these divisions; 3) the impact of gendered interactional processes; 4) these three processes help create gendered elements within individuals' identity; 5) the fundamental, ongoing processes of creating and conceptualising social structures, including that of complex organisations (Acker 1990, pp.146–147). These five processes are used in the production of gender relations, but also affect the relations between different social classes.

The gendered nature of organisations pervades public and private lives and reinforces the continued subordinate position of women, particularly within the public sphere, by ensuring their subordinate place within the workplace. The gendered nature of social work organisations can be seen within the vertically gendered segregation of front-line social workers and Directors of Social Services (Lyons *et al.* 1995; Pringle 1995; Davey 2002; Christie 2008), with men more significantly represented at the highest levels of management, and proportionately less represented in the entry-level positions. There are several possible explanations for this gendered segregation. The impact of household and caring responsibilities on women may be one reason, and a second possible reason is the focus of men on attaining the more 'masculine-appropriate' domain in social work of a management post (Williams 1992; Simpson 2009). The gendered pattern of ascension into and through management is not clearly understood. Davey (2002) suggests that a higher percentage of men professed a

desire to move into UK social care management than their women counterparts but upon reaching the first tier of management there appeared to be no difference in the ascension rates of men and women. She explained this as a result of the difference in caring responsibilities and full- and part-time working patterns between men and women.

Cameron *et al.* (1999, p.20) argued that 'we have a convincing account of how gender permeates work and institutions, what is less convincing is the relative importance of gender to identity in the work context'. Considering how gender and identity relate led to an exploration of theories that explain gender, identity and interaction. It was hoped that these theories could be helpful to understand how men managed their gender during their course experience.

'Doing Gender'

West and Zimmerman's (1987; 2009) theory of 'doing gender' is widely used in studies about gender (Messerschmidt 2009). This theory argues that gender expression is created by a set of repeated acts and that gender is something that is performed or 'done', instead of an innately held or static identity position. Their work has been heralded as an 'extremely important theoretical shift' (Jurik and Siensen 2009, p.72) and a 'conceptual breakthrough... [that] remains immensely salient in sociology, gender studies, and feminist theory' (Messerschmidt 2009, p.85). Drawing on Goffman's (1976) work and the theory of symbolic interactionism as a conceptual framework, in this theory gender is accomplished through interactions between individuals, and between individuals and groups. Instead of viewing gender identity as an internal construct, immutably set, they suggest that 'gender is a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction' (West and Zimmerman 1987, p.125). 'Doing gender' requires both the production and receipt of actions related to each person's gender to avoid causing uncertainty and embarrassment (Goffman 1976). West and Zimmerman argue that moving consideration from the internal to an interactional focus means

that institutional gender processes can be scrutinised more effectively (1987, p.126).

Essential to this theory is the dialogic nature of gender interactions, using a 'statement-response' mechanism between individuals to communicate gender identities very quickly, but with deeply-held expectations of behaviour (Goffman 1976; West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender is performed according to a set of social rules, different for men and women (Goffman 1977). Also following Goffman's conceptualising, Chafetz (1990) suggests that 'men and women require members of the opposite gender to validate their gender identities. They do this by giving one another opportunities to display those behaviours socially defined as specific to one gender' (pg. 26). Differentiation of expectations with different genders is acknowledged to be a central feature of continuation of gender inequality (Lorber 1995). These expected behaviours are codified into gender norms, which also support the division of labour for men and women (Chafetz 1990). These gender norms allow for punishment or sanctions to be applied to people who do not conform to those norms expected of their social group or genre (Butler 2004; Coston and Kimmel 2012; Salih 2002; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). When individuals do not perform their gender appropriately for specific contexts, they are called to account, or regulated, to attempt to encourage them to conform. For example for a man to be considered by others as a man, he needs to present a credible appearance of masculinity (Schwalbe, 2005), which 'requires mastering a set of conventional signifying practices through which the identity "man" is established and upheld in interaction' (Schrock and Scwalbe, 2009: 279). This is of particular importance for men in social work, for by entering 'women's work', some may regard their performance of manhood to reside out of expected gender norms.

West and Zimmerman's 'doing gender' theory has been critiqued for its ubiquity (Pullen and Simpson 2009), but also because its use is so widespread that the

concept is used uncritically and indiscriminately (Risman 2009). More importantly, a further critique is that instead of acting as a fulcrum to increase gender equality this theory may actually *contribute* to gender inequality. It may facilitate this inequality by perpetuating the dominant social perception that the gender binary (and gender oppression) is resistant to change. Deutsch (2007, p.109) even goes so far as that 'it is difficult to imagine how the theory could ultimately lead us to understand how gender inequality could be dismantled.' This desire for gender to be dismantled is suggested by theorists that argue the *undoing* of gender as more beneficial to gender equality than to this concept of 'doing'.

Because this study explores the experiences of men entering settings typically associated with women (Christie, 1998; Cree, 2001; Williams, 1993), 'doing gender's' concentration on social interactions was useful. But because the study focused on men's experiences, it was necessary to consider theories of masculinity. It was hoped that theories of masculinity could potentially explain men's experiences and progression issues.

Theories of Masculinity

Gender studies have proliferated in the past few decades, and draw significantly upon feminist theory. Within the field of gender studies, theories of masculinity are often viewed as recent additions. As a field of study, masculinity is noted to be relatively young, and without the internal robust dialogue that is expected from more developed fields. Carrigan *et al.* (1985; Simpson 2004) identified three wide frameworks from the masculinity literature: psychoanalytic, 'social relations' and post-structuralist. The first of these, the psychoanalytic framework, centres on the internal psychological dependence that individuals have in both gender and sexual identity formation. Masculinity here is suggested primarily as a flight from

women – from the original relationship with a ‘maternal figure’ – and the repudiation of the feminine (see Chodorow 1994; Hollway 1994; Kimmel 1994). The second, the ‘social relations’ perspective, investigates how social practices are organised as sets of social relations. Masculinity is here viewed as a distinct set of social practices (Tolson 1977; Connell 1987). Some of Connell’s early work (1987) argues that the structure of social relations is imbued with power, and these relations comprise a ‘gender regime’ in any organisation. Masculinity and gender, more broadly, are seen as social practices. Recently, masculinity theories have begun to contain suggestions of ambiguity, complexity and fluidity, as well as emphasise the importance of both symbolism and individual agency in the construction of gender. This post-structuralist perspective argues that masculinity is not only constructed, but also reconstructed (Whitehead 2002; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Simpson 2004; Simpson 2009). It argues that there is not a single masculinity, but instead multiple masculinities that form in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Masculinity therefore becomes masculinities, and is argued to be ambiguous, internally conflicted, and unstable (Alvesson 1998; Kerfoot and Whitehead 1998; Collinson and Hearn 2000; Whitehead 2002; Connell 2005).

Hegemonic Masculinity

In masculinity literature, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is often described as the prevailing standard to which other theories relate (some writers have even suggested the theory itself has become hegemonic; see Hearn, 2004). Carrigan *et al.* (1985) were the first to use the phrase ‘hegemonic masculinity’. The concept of hegemony was originally used by Gramsci (1971) to describe a particular form of political, cultural and economic dominance by one group subordinating other groups. This dominance includes supplanting other forms of ‘common-sense’, so that the subordinated groups are regarded as being complicit in supporting the hegemony, sometimes without their knowledge. When hegemony is used in relation to masculinity, ‘certain constructions of masculinity are hegemonic, while others are subordinated or marginalised’ (1992, p.736).

Hegemonic masculinity is locally determined, with variations and fluctuations occurring across time and space, and importantly involves the collusion of some men and women in order to sustain unequal gender relations of power (Hearn 2004).

Hegemonic masculinity is identified within the current Western Anglophone society as epitomising emotional restraint, homophobia, career and economic prowess, and rationality. This theory suggests that society privileges some presentations of masculinity over others, creating an ideal of masculinity than men are compared against (Kerfoot and Knights 1993). It suggests that some men are more privileged than others because of how close they conform and to and identify with the masculine ideal and others, being farther away from this ideal, are less privileged and subordinated, but continue to support the hegemony, thereby only partially benefitting from the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell 1995). The hegemony (and other dominant discourses) survives because it creates social control, even though this social control may not be recognised by the actors in these settings (Burr 1995). Importantly, even though some men are subordinated in relation to other men, all women are subordinated to all men, regardless of their position to the hegemonic ideal. This subordination of femininity is central to the theory, for 'the anti-femininity component of masculinity is perhaps the single dominant and universal characteristic' (Kimmel 2004, p.97). This repudiation of femininity has repercussions for men in WMO, for they are seen to be undertaking 'women's work', and by entering WMO become 'tainted' with attributes and characteristics associated with femininity.

Hegemonic masculinity draws on earlier masculinity work, such as Brannon (1976) who neatly summed up ideal masculinity with four maxims: 'No Sissy Stuff'; 'The Big Wheel'; 'The Sturdy Oak'; 'Give 'Em Hell'. These suggest men should repudiate anything identified as feminine ('No Sissy Stuff'), but also that men should be autonomous ('The Big Wheel') and unemotional ('The Sturdy

Oak'). It also suggested masculinity includes aggression and risk-taking ('Give 'Em Hell'). These maxims continue to hold currency, even though outlined over 40 years ago (Kimmel and Messner 2010). They are often used as easily understood parameters for expected masculine behaviours.

Masculinity theories have recently expanded to include consideration of concepts such as ambiguity, complexity and fluidity. This fluidity argues that masculinity is not only constructed, but is also possibly reconstructed by individuals during interactions (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Simpson 2004; Simpson 2009; Whitehead 2002). These theorists argue there is not a single form of masculinity, but instead multiple masculinities prevail that form in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Masculinity therefore becomes masculinities, and is argued to be ambiguous, internally conflicted, and unstable (Alvesson, 1998; Collinson & Hearn, 2000; Connell, 2005; Kerfoot & Whitehead, 1998; Whitehead, 2002).

This theory may be of use within the present study because of the potential impact that studying WMO has upon men's masculinity, since previous studies suggest that men's masculine identity may be impacted adversely by a range of negative perceptions associated with role ambiguity influenced by their gender identity (Foster and Newman 2005; Giesler 2013; Tucker 2015; Weaver-Hightower 2011). Some writers have called schools 'masculinity-making devices' (Connell 1989; Haywood and Mac an Ghail 1996, p.59), and entering a university educational context also includes some elements of gender role communication, role modelling and negotiation for men (Laker and Davis 2011). When considering these theories of gender and masculinities, what became clear was that whilst they depicted individuated responses, and macro-processes, they did not provide as clear an understanding of the potential process for institutional actors. Goffman's work was considered in order to address this. Stigma theory describes and explains the impact of a process for individuals, and how they manage these experiences through specific reactions.

Theories of Stigma

This section explores Goffman's theory of stigma (1963), as well as using extensions of the same and considers its potential application to the current study. West and Zimmerman's gender theory (1987) used Goffman as a basis, providing an interesting synergy for the present study. Goffman's work spans sociology, linguistic theory, philosophy and social commentary. His body of work, published mostly in the 1950s and 1960s (but continuing into the early 1980s) consistently explores the interaction of institutional actors. His texts present a range of situations and responses, but predominantly focus on how actors present themselves in social situations, and the management of their public persona(s). Goffman's work included cultural theory and sociology, but as an ethnomethodologist he was particularly interested in interaction between individuals and how they acted within institutions. He used dramaturgical analysis as a way to explain individuals' behaviour in different settings. Extending Durkheim's considerations of ritual, he proposed that behaviours in public are often proscribed by rituals, providing the appearance of social order because of their repetitive occurrence (Collins 1980). He is interested in social institutions, and how the actors involved in them behave in everyday interactions. This interest led to a wide variety of explorations, such as the behaviour of patients in mental health hospitals, and the actions of patrons and employees of Las Vegas casinos. He was particularly interested in how some individuals are constructed as *outside* the norm, both by their behaviour and by the way others interact with them (Burns, 1992).

One of Goffman's most widely-used constructs, stigma theory continues to be used across a range of fields and topics (Pescosolido and Martin 2015). His work on stigma (1963) has been significantly influential in a number of social sciences, including psychology, sociology, and criminology (Barreto and Ellemers 2010; Jones *et al.* 1984; Link and Phelan 2001). In short, he defines stigma as the mark of any quality that lowers the social value of individuals possessing the quality. In

Goffman's thinking, stigma is not intrinsic, but relates a 'special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype' (Goffman 1963, p.4). The attribute is identified by society as problematic, and then connected to stereotypes, which lessen the social value of the individual. Goffman divides society into 'normals' and 'stigmatised'; the first group including everyone the 'stigmatised' are compared to and found as wanting. These differences are intrinsic to how groups manage interpersonal interactions, using disciplinary processes such as punishment, oversight and labelling when difference or deviation from the norm is perceived (Toyoki and Brown 2014). Goffman was particularly interested in what he called 'mixed contacts'; situations where 'stigmatised' persons were in contact with 'normals'. He called these situations 'one of the primal scenes of sociology' (Goffman 1963, p.24), suggesting they were useful for understanding the experience of 'stigmatised' persons, and also the mechanisms used for perpetrating discrimination and isolating difference.

According to Goffman, stigmatised individuals have 'spoiled identities'; the spoiling is caused by the gap between what they are, and what they are assumed to be (Campos, 2015). This gap is the originating site of an attribute of shame, because the 'stigmatised' *have the same beliefs about normality as the rest of society*, meaning they internalise the stigma, believing they are lacking as a result. The stigma pervades their identity, 'spoiling' it, making them feel unsuitable for full participation in whatever situation is being considered, but importantly, 'normals' feel the 'stigmatised' are unsuitable for full participation within their designated 'group' as well. This theory suggests that stigma gives the impression of a stain that cannot be washed off. It is either visibly apparent, or one has to choose to inform others of the stigma (*i.e.* 'out' oneself). Most stigma scholars suggest there are two broad forms of stressors that arise from experience of stigma: the effect of potential discrimination or retribution from others; and the internalisation of stigma, resulting with a negative impact on the individual's self-worth (Stuber *et al.* 2008).

Types of Stigma and Stigmatised and Their Processes

Goffman (1963) suggested that there are three types of stigma: body; character; and tribe. Body stigma includes physical disabilities and disfigurements; character includes flaws connected with 'poor choices', suggested as addictions and homosexuality; stigma of tribe is related to stigma received hereditarily, such as ethnicity or nationality. It is generally assumed, however, that 'stigma is context dependent, and that it results from processes of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination, which are profoundly social' (Toyoki and Brown 2014, p.717).

Stigma theory contains two types of stigmatised individuals, the 'discredited' and the 'discreditable'. The discredited are unable to hide their stigmatising issue; the stigma is visibly apparent. The discreditable, in contrast, can sometimes appear as 'normal'; their stigmatising issue is not always apparent. The difference is important because this theory suggests there are different shame management mechanisms available to these two groups. Studying management mechanisms of stigma shame is a central focus for many stigma studies (Barreto and Ellemers 2010; Link and Phelan 2001). The stigmatised can attempt to manage the impact of their stigma by covering, passing, or refusing the stigma. The discredited can attempt to 'cover', by minimising the appearance of their stigma to reduce the tension it causes, but it is unlikely they will be able to 'pass'. Passing is defined as walking amongst 'normals' without attracting their notice, often using disidentifiers, or actions suggesting one is not stigmatised ('normal'), sometimes in an overt manner. These two mechanisms use what Goffman called normification (1963, p.134), the hiding of the stigma issue in order to relieve tension in interactions.

Two mechanisms used to refuse acceptance of the stigma are 'minstrelization' and 'militancy'. In the first, the stigmatised play up easily identified stigma markers; think of a very camp gay man deliberately displaying heightened effeminate behaviour. Militancy is when the stigmatised appear refuse to accept

the stigma, creating their own social rules and suggesting their stigma attributes are actually a benefit (Gerschick and Miller 1995). Individuals that refuse to concur with societal norms include what Goffman (and others of his time) called 'deviants' (1963, pp.167–174). One group of deviants is relevant for consideration within the context of the present study, the 'disaffiliates'. Goffman described disaffiliates as:

'Individuals who are seen as declining voluntarily and openly to accept the social place accorded them, and who act irregularly and somewhat rebelliously in connexion with our basic institutions - the family, the age-grade system, the stereotyped role-division between the sexes.' (Goffman 1963, p.170)

Disaffiliates are of interest for this study because through these individuals are alleged to flout the rules of society through their actions, refusing to obey, and experience stigma as a result. Sometimes individuals with stigma group together, but there is disagreement as to whether this a protective or problematic activity (Barreto and Ellemers 2010). Connection by the 'stigmatised' to a group of other stigmatised individuals is particularly important in stigma theory (Barreto and Ellemers 2010). These gatherings of stigmatised persons are used as attempts to codify their own social rules, but they also result in separation from normal society, with stigmatised often feeling they need to minimise their stigma to be accepted by 'normals' ('normification') (Goffman 1963, pp.139–149). This separation of 'us and them' is integral to the shame felt by the 'stigmatised' (Link and Phelan 2001), and shame itself relates to an identity of a 'defective' self (Balfe *et al*, 2010).

Grouping together is one of two broad methods of managing the effects of stigma, called 'in-group' alignment (Goffman 1963). In-group alignment suggests the stigmatised strengthens or deliberately connects with other stigmatised, or stigma characteristics, to manage the effects of stigma. Group therapy and belonging to organised groups connected to the stigma are examples of in-group alignment, as are the actions of highlighting stigma characteristics, as these

mechanisms encourage connection with other stigmatised. The second method of stigma management relates to out-group alignment, or attempting to see oneself from the perspective of 'normals', and refusing to highlight the impact or characteristics of one's stigma. These different alignments result in a variety of mechanisms for managing the social and personal impact of the stigma.

Disengagement is another stigma-management technique identified by a number of stigma researchers (Crocker *et al.* 1998; Miller and Kaiser 2001; Varni *et al.* 2012). Disengagement in stigma research relates to two types of behaviour, either avoiding stigma-related situations or disavowal of discrimination (Miller and Kaiser 2001). These techniques seek to alleviate the stress of the stigma by avoiding it, but avoidance also has additional negative effects, such as overall adjustment issues (Miller and Kaiser 2001).

Stigma theorists have suggested that the 'controllability' of one's stigma is important to how the stigmatised are treated, with those that choose to transgress social rules more stigmatised (Crocker *et al.* 1998). One of the potential functions of stigma is an attempt to control the effect of people who 'by their mere existence they call into question whether one's worldview is correct - they challenge the cultural standards by which individuals evaluate their own worth and manage their existential anxiety' (Crocker, Major and Steele, 1998, p. 511; see also Nelson, 2015). Challenges to cultural standards could be in the form of behaviour that transgresses stereotypes, such as a man undertaking roles associated with caring (such as social work), as women are considered more naturally caring.

Situations are important when considering the impact and management of stigma for the stigmatised. When situations are likely to elicit stereotypes, these can have an impact on the performance of the stigmatised (Smith and White 2002). Crocker, Major and Steele suggest 'performance in settings where the negative

stereotype applies can take on a more threatening meaning than for those not stereotyped in the same way' (1998, p.519). In fact, the importance a person places on the situation can have an influence on their performance in these stereotype-eliciting situations, the more value someone places on the situation, the worse their performance (Smith and Johnson 2006). This is useful for consideration in the present study because of the expected importance students place on performing to ensure they complete their social work course, and impact that possible stereotypes might have on student engagement, achievement and practice (Christie 1998b; Cree 1996; Parker and Crabtree 2014).

The last element of stigma theory which could be of use in the present study is the concept of a 'moral career' (Goffman 1963, p.32). A moral career in this theory suggests there are phases a person experiences as a result of their stigma. First, they learn what 'normal' means and the attributes normalcy contains, and the second phase is when they discover they have a stigma based on their realisation that they have deviated from the norm. Goffman suggests 'the phase of experience during which he learns that he possesses a stigma is of specific interest' (1963, p.36). Men studying other WMO have been found to experience unexpected discrimination (Foster and Newman 2005; Weaver-Hightower 2011) during their course, suggesting social work student men's course experience to be a potentially fruitful area of study.

Stigma theory and their applications have been the subject of critique. An early criticism outlined the theory constructed the 'stigmatised' as passive victims, and did not adequately consider the political engagement of those included in this category (Anspach 1979; Hahn 1985). Link and Phelan (2001) suggest with its wide applications, the theory's definition has become more ambiguous than Goffman's clear outline. Some argue Goffman's theory does not give enough consideration to the effects of social structure (Pescosolido *et al*, 2008; Scambler, 2004). Importantly for applied research, others suggest that Goffman

and subsequent applications do not provide an adequate account of measures that might be employed to address the effects of stigmatisation (Baxter and Cummins 1992).

It seemed possible that stigma theory could be usefully applied to the context of men social work students. As evidenced by Coston and Kimmel's (2012) extension of the stigma theory, individuals may experience privilege from one attribute, but marginalisation from another (see also Link and Phelan 2001). They critiqued the perception that people are either stigmatised or not, suggesting instead that 'among members of one privileged class, other mechanisms of marginalisation may mute or reduce privilege based on another status' (Coston and Kimmel 2012, p.110). They argue that gender can also be used to marginalise some men in some situations, causing them to experience stigma. Pescosolido *et al.* remind us that 'stigma is socially constructed in and through social relationships, its essence lies in the "rules" which guide behaviour at particular points in time and place by defining it as acceptable, customary, "normal," or expected' (2008, p.432). Men, compared to women are regarded by some to be privileged, generally, and when they experience stigma, they are expected to be able to easily avoid stigmatising situations (Crocker *et al.* 1998). These applications of stigma theory have further informed the theoretical paradigm and to allow for more nuanced and complicated presentations of stigma and privilege to emerge.

Importantly for this study, when people experience stigma they have been found to perform more poorly in education and work (Barreto and Ellemers 2010; Crocker *et al.* 1998). Stigma effects can be experienced publicly, internally and structurally, including discrimination (Pryor and Reeder 2011). These effects are useful when considering the theory's application for this setting. In addition, Goffman focussed a section of his work on the consideration of gender (Goffman 1976; Goffman 1977), arguing in *The Arrangement of the Sexes* that 'parallel

organization based on sex provides a ready base for the elaboration of differential treatment' (Goffman 1977, p.306), and differential treatment is one of the essential elements of stigma theory (Link and Phelan 2001). His work has been used to consider how gender differentiation has caused and perpetuated gender inequality (Chafetz 1990), suggesting some affinity between his theories and the subsequent consideration of gender and individual experiences.

Summary

A range of theories could be applied to the context of men's progression through social work courses. Each of the theories described above could have had some merit for application in the current study, but it was necessary to select those with the most possible explanatory power. Because of the limitations explained previously, it seemed necessary to consider more than one of these theories when combined may help explain the experiences of men social work students. For example, retention theories explain issues affecting student persistence and some reasons for failure or withdrawal, but are typically gender-neutral. Stigma theory may help to explain some men's experiences, such as their relationship with their placement and class colleagues, but may benefit from considering gender and masculinity theories to explain possible underlying stereotypes defining the stigma men may experience. There are strong synergies between Goffman's work (1963; 1976) and West and Zimmerman's conceptualisation of 'doing gender' (1987; 2009), and it was productive to consider these in combination to potentially understand any potential impact for men about their gender affecting engagement in a women-majority setting of higher education. These considerations also benefit from the explanations provided by conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity, specifically the expectation that men are judged against an ideal, similar to how a 'stigmatised' is judged against a 'normal'. Usefully, Goffman's work describes and explains the impact of institutions for individual actors. It seemed reasonable to consider whether the

social work education setting included experiences that may affect the progression of some men. Qualitative methods are needed when attempting to explore and uncover how experiences inter-relate, particularly for reasons that may be not readily apparent. Qualitative methods and the methods used in this study are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods used in this study. To do this coherently, the chapter first presents the research questions and how they were developed. The chapter then discusses how the methods were selected including a rationale for using qualitative methods. A description of how the semi-structured interviews were developed are followed by the philosophical underpinnings forming the foundation of the present study. Sampling, the selected sites and their range is outlined in the next section. The chapter then describes the approach used to analyse interview data. Next, the chapter addresses ethical issues raised by this study. The following section of the chapter contains a description of the trustworthiness and validity issues associated with the methods used. The profile of the sample of participants is then outlined, including demographic and progression information. Lastly, the chapter explores the study limitations inherent in the methods selected.

Introducing the research questions

Previous chapters identified concerns with men's academic progression in higher education and more specifically from pre-qualifying social work courses in the UK. From these concerns, this primary research question appeared unanswered by available literature:

Why are there greater progression problems for men than for women in social work courses in England?

Progression problems for men studying social work have resulted in calls for research to explain. Both the previous regulating body for social workers, the GSCC (2008), as well as several scholars (Christie 2001b; Scourfield 2006a; Hussein *et al.* 2009; Giesler and Beadlescomb 2015) have suggested the need

for better understanding of the issue. The quantitative analysis, presented in Chapter Three, showed a consistent presentation of men's progression on social work courses in England over several years (Schaub 2015a). This analysis provided useful context to understand men's progression, but did not explain why the problem exists, or, indeed, any possible ways to resolve the issue. It could not, as this would be impossible using quantitative methods. These findings suggested qualitative findings were needed to explore men's experiences, and whether their experiences could help us understand their progression problems.

Since the primary research question is not fully addressed by available research, further research questions were developed to guide the scope of the present study, with an expectation that these specific questions would provide a thorough and nuanced insight into the reasons for men's progression problems in social work:

How does men's social work progression relate to men's general experience in education?

How do the progression issues experienced by men in social work compare to other WMO professions?

What are the characteristics of progression for other minority groups in social work?

What are men's experiences of studying social work, and can these experiences help us understand their progression problems?

The first three questions were addressed using a range of different literatures, providing a widespread and integrated context for progression issues. The final question was unanswerable using available knowledge, and contributes to a comprehensive understanding of men's progression issues. The methods designed to answer this question are outlined in a further section below, but the underpinning philosophy needs to be explained to provide a backdrop for the study design.

Methodology

Ontological approach

Social science research has included reference to ‘paradigm wars’ for decades, predominantly between positivist and interpretivist approaches (Bryman 2008b; Hammersley 1992; Morgan 2007). These disagreements and tensions tend to be about *ontological* differences. Put simply, positivist researchers believe the physical world can be perceived, counted and measured objectively, and interpretivists believe the world can only be perceived through the lens of our experience (or *interpreted*).

This study uses an interpretivist ontology. Interpretivism includes social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann 1967) as an underpinning philosophy. Social constructionism suggests reality is constructed by individuals during and through social interactions. The interpretivist researcher is seeking to grasp and understand the participant’s phenomenon through the research process (Schwandt, 1994). They are not seeking to objectively collect a discrete set of experiences, nor are they trying to generalise from the sample to the population. They are trying to understand ‘the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it’ (Schwandt, 1994: 221). Qualitative research is more typically associated with interpretivism (Bryman 2008a). Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p.14) suggested this brief definition of qualitative research: ‘Its essence is twofold: a commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its subject matter and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of postpositivism.’ As described in the previous chapter, much of gender theory considers interaction between individuals, as do theories of stigma, so it is fitting that this study ascribes and accords broadly to this description.

Tools that allow interaction and dialogue between researcher and participant are encouraged in interpretivist studies, such as interviews or participant observation,

as 'individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 111). Because of these suggestions, and a desire for discussion with participants to elicit rich experiential data, interviews were the most pragmatic choice of tool for use within the present study.

This study used an interpretivist approach and qualitative methodologies in an attempt to answer the research questions outlined above. It seeks to understand the experiences of men social work students as a way of trying to improve their progression. This requires engaging with their perceptions, and used this knowledge as a fulcrum to consider the reasons for men's poorer progression on social work courses in England.

The primary consideration when selecting methods for this study was whether they would be the best methods to answer the posed research questions; this is defined as pragmatism. Greene & Caracelli (1997) and others (Patton 1988) argue the *pragmatic* approach suggests choosing methods based on their effectiveness in answering the research questions. This approach is often described as choosing 'what works best'. This pragmatic approach recommended qualitative methods to be used to understand the progression experience of men social work students. Because of strictures of time, a more focussed design with less time *in situ* than an ethnography approach was required, which guided the researcher to adopt semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate tool with a range of participants, who were selected purposively.

Design

There are several interlocking reasons for gathering participant narratives: given that men's progression problems on social work courses in England is already

proven statistically; and the wider context is explored by a range of literature, but the reasons for this poorer progression are not understood; a consideration of men's experiences whilst studying social work seemed necessary to explain why there are greater progression problems for this group. In addition, when considering potential explanatory theories, qualitative methods seemed necessary to examine the phenomenon as they are useful to unearth hidden processes. This meant that an exploratory method was necessary to understand the experiences and how these could help understand the issue (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative methods are useful to examine how a phenomenon is experienced (Silverman 2011). They are used to explore and understand experiences and complicated interactions. Given the lack of understanding about the reasons why men had progression problems, it seemed appropriate to seek in-depth, nuanced accounts about their experiences to understand men's 'career' as social work students. Men's views about progression problems had not been previously sought, and our understanding about the problem was lacking their voice. All of these reasons require qualitative methods to address them, and suggested using men's experiences as a way to understand their progression problems.

Because men's experiences were necessary to explain the research question, and their voices were missing from other available progression studies, a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews was selected. This design seeks to elicit findings about men social work students' experience by using their accounts to understand men's progression issues. It uses qualitative semi-structured interviews as the core method to elicit the accounts of social work student men. Berg (2009, p.8) suggests 'qualitative techniques allow researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives.' Research questions attempting to describe experiences or to explore a process are usually best answered with qualitative methods (Creswell, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006), while quantitative methods usually test hypotheses about the relationship

between variables (Creswell, 2009). Interviews allow the opportunity for the world of the participant to be explored, and for a nuanced understanding of the experience to be developed (Qu and Dumay 2011). The exploration of men's experiences was particularly useful for this study, as previous studies had not gathered men's views about social work progression. Because their views had not been sought, interviews provided a mechanism to explore their perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2013) about social work education experience and progression. In comparison to quantitative studies, the small sample size recruited allowed for depth, and a nuanced understanding of participant experiences, rather than attempt to generalise to a wider population (Gentles *et al.* 2015). These reasons suggested qualitative methods and interviews were appropriate for use in the present study.

Most studies researching men in women-majority occupations (WMO) employ interviews as the primary, if not only, method of gathering data (e.g., Williams, 1993; Lupton, 2006; Simpson, 2009). The majority of these studies, however, use *retrospective* accounts of participants recalling their experiences at university, which alters their reporting (Bernard *et al.* 1984). There are fewer studies that interview men whilst they are actually engaged in studying to join WMO. There are notable exceptions within other, comparable professions (see Chapter Two), but only one study using interviews was discovered that related to social work in the current educational context in England (Parker and Crabtree 2014), which was conducted as a single-site study. This study, and other previous studies, have explored men's experience of studying social work (Cree 1996; Parker and Crabtree 2014), but did not have progression as their primary driver. These previous studies have also either been single-site studies, not in England, or were undertaken before degree-level social work education. The present research study therefore aims to address this gap by interviewing social work student men across a number of social work courses in England to better understand both their experience of social work education, and seeks to use

these experiences to inform understanding about men's academic progression issues.

Previous quantitative studies have examined social work student progression (Hussein, *et al*, 2005; 2006; 2009), using regression modelling to describe the progression of social work students, and to identify those student groups that demonstrate greater progression issues. Studies relying on this form of analysis have also qualitatively explored the experience of students from a variety of backgrounds (BME, disabilities, and LGB) (Bernard, Fairtlough, Fletcher, & Ahmet, 2011; Dillon, 2011), but no previous quantitative analyses concentrated specifically on men social work students in the current social work educational setting. In order to address this gap, Chapter Three of the present study presents findings from a previously completed regression analysis of men student progression, using the most recently available data from the previous social work regulator (Schaub, 2015). This analysis provided useful contextual knowledge about specific progression issues for men, when managing for their other identity characteristics. This analysis showed men have poorer progression than women, regardless of other factors including disability, ethnicity and age. These results supported the need to more completely understand the qualitative experience of men in order to explain this poorer progression.

Given the above outcomes cited from previous studies, an ethnography would be useful (Patton, 2002) to generate the 'thickest' description (Geertz 1973) of men's experiences. However, given issues of time and travel, this was not feasible. An ethnography would also require significant time spent *in situ* to allow for issues to present organically, therefore resisting using multiple sites. A more focused approach was necessary, with individual participants from several universities, purposively selected for their ability to describe their experience. In addition, an ethnography would not have been able to consider multiple social work courses. As previous studies had primarily been single-site, and often used

retrospective accounts, the present study elected to interview men currently studying social work multiple universities.

Interview Development

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study supported by a schedule of pre-determined questions and topics, but permitting freedom for the interviewer or participant to explore various topics that were considered to have relevance to the research question. This structure allowed the interview to be focused by the interviewer, but also enabled participants to raise those issues they felt important to the topic. It was important to allow this freedom, for Padgett (2008, p.100) states 'most researchers go into the field with ready-made questions but expect and seek out the impromptu'. These interviews were what Flick (2009) and Merton & Kendall (1946) would call a *focused interview*, with a deliberate attempt to engage the participant with topics related to the research questions. When suggesting how to construct a qualitative interview, Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p.141) argue that the most important element is combining 'structure with flexibility', and suggest qualitative interview schedules may change during the study to assist with gathering robust data.

In the present study the initial interview questions were devised using concepts identified in the literature review, generating broad interview questions. These were piloted with a small group of men social work students. This pilot phase was helpful and resulted in refined interview questions and topics. For example, during this phase, pilot participants spoke about family responsibilities as a consistent concern, resulting in this being included in the initial interview schedule. The pilot study generated less focussed data than was needed for a study of the depth to respond purposefully to the above cited research questions. Interpretivist studies often use loosely structured interview questions (Thomas 2011) to gather a broader understanding of participant experiences. Specifically, the early interviews struggled to elicit accounts about men's academic

challenges. Early participants were not forthcoming about their academic problems, and struggled to describe any associated potential progression problems. As a result, during the data gathering phase the interview questions were developed further. These changes more effectively probed participants and drew out their experiences relating to progression issues. Later interviews probed participants more specifically about progression issues, moving away from a general course experience discussion. These changes helped to generate data more closely aligned to the research question about progression, and the adoption of greater flexibility in question style allowed for more informative data to be gathered.

Interviews have been suggested as a useful tool for understanding the experience of participants from their own perspective. Miller and Glassner (2011, p.137) suggest 'interviewing is a particularly useful method for examining the social world from the points of view of research participants'. Gaining their perspectives was necessary to apply these to progression issues. The research questions seek to gain insight and understanding about 'lived' experience from the perspective of men students; as a result, interviews were considered to be the most effective way of accessing and eliciting these perspectives.

The interviews were conducted, as advised above, using a semi-structured format, with some prescribed outlines, allowing also for free dialogue between interviewer and participants. Social work students undertake placement experiences during their course, and Scourfield (2001b) advises that interviewing social workers mirrors their interviewing of service users. He suggests that social workers are an easy group to interview, as they use interviews in their work, and are used to telling a story. Whilst social work students are still gaining experience, they are developing familiarity with interviewing service users and other professionals. This familiarity with interviews within the context of the social work setting was helpful, as participants were comfortable with basic interview

tenets such as confidentiality and recording, but could also present challenges as some participants expected the interview to concur more closely to a practitioner interview, causing some respondents to express surprise when the questions became more focussed towards progression.

This dialogue required negotiation and compromise, as interviews offer an opportunity to gain understanding of participants' worlds, but in the slightly false setting of a formalised interview. Glassner and Loughlin's (1987, p.34) seminal text suggest 'much of what goes on is two persons trying to understand topics that neither would consider in quite this manner or detail except in such special circumstances'. Interviews can create a space to concentrate on topics which may be otherwise unexamined. Interviews can bring obscured or hidden processes into sharp relief by showing 'ways in which people organize views of themselves, of others, and of their social worlds' and thereby gain 'insight into the human experience and arriving at meanings or culturally embedded normative explanation' (Orbuch 1997, p.455). Interviews are one of the ways to obtain access to these accounts, and to gain insight into the personal lived experience of participants. As a way of managing the 'artificiality' of the formalised setting of the interview and encourage participation, rapport-building techniques were deliberately used, such as connecting with participants about social work topics or practice settings (King and Horrocks 2010). By using these techniques, participants were encouraged to speak more freely about their personal experiences relating to progression.

Since this study investigates participants' experiences as men, it seems reasonable for the interviewer's gender to be considered. A range of scholars have explored any possible effect of the gender of the interviewer for interviewees (Padfield and Procter 1996; Williams and Heikes 1993; Reinharz and Chase 2003; Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2001). There is no decisive finding available from the literature, but they suggest interview-based studies consider

the gender of both interviewer and participants, as well as the interview setting. Williams and Heikes (1993, p.288) remind the researcher to be 'aware of how respondents take into account the gendered context of the interview'. Considering the 'gendered context', it is important to focus awareness on these issues because it may affect participants' engagement in the interview. For as Lupton (2006, p.111) suggests, 'my presence... as a man necessarily influenced the nature of the encounter and the substance of the exchange'. A range of strategies were therefore applied in the present study to militate against interviewer bias and to improve men's interview engagement. These included techniques such as gendered rapport-building, agreement, negotiation and giving consideration to men's need to present autonomy, rationality and control (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2001).

Research Process

Selecting University Sites

The present study sought to recruit participants from a diverse range of undergraduate social work programmes. Seven universities were selected to provide as broad a range of experiences as possible, from across England. The university names have been changed to provide anonymity; the pseudonyms are listed in the table below (Table 3). The criteria used to select the universities were:

- Number: Seven universities were selected to provide an adequate range and number participants; some programmes only had a single man in a year group, requiring multiple sites to generate enough men required for a study of this depth. The sample also provides for a wide range of university type, location and programme.
- Location: The universities were spread throughout England, with three in the South, and four in the Midlands and North.

- University type: A diverse range of university 'types' were selected. There were two 'older' universities ('University of the South' & 'North Midlands University') the remainder were 'new' universities. Universities given the status prior to 1992 were considered 'old', and those after 1992 were considered 'new'. Three universities are considered research-intensive, and one that is research active, with three that had comparatively weaker research activity (determined via discussion with course leaders, or the university's publicly available material). The range was chosen to provide as diverse a range of participant experiences as possible.
- Programme size and type: Participants were recruited from undergraduate programmes that ranged in size from small (approximately 25 students per academic year), to medium (approximately 40 or 60 per year) to one of the largest in England (approximately 75-80 per year) with corresponding academic entrance requirements (from 'selective' recruitment to courses that accept students with comparatively lower academic backgrounds).
- Student diversity: The programmes included differing levels of diverse students. Some had predominantly White British students ('University of the South' and 'University 1994'), but others had a more diverse range of students, including comparatively higher percentages of BME students ('Uni Metro'), the final selection of participants was based on discussions and information obtained from course leaders and participants themselves.

Table 3 University Sites and Participants

| Pseudonym | Number of interviews |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| University of the South | 3 |
| University 1994 | 5 |
| University of the North | 4 |
| Uni Metro | 5 |
| University of the Middle | 1 |
| South Midlands University | 2 |
| North Midlands University | 1 |
| Total | 21 |

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Participants were recruited and selected purposively to provide as wide a range as possible (Gobo 2004). This included a range of ethnicities, entrance routes, backgrounds, universities and progression issues. Maxwell (2012, pp.98–99) identifies five goals for robust purposive sampling, which are loosely summarised here:

1. Typicality of participant (seeking to ensure participants are broadly representative of the population)
2. Ensuring the sample includes a range of participants, so they are not unusual or a small subset of the population
3. Deliberately select participants that allow the researcher to test concepts or theories
4. Select participants that allow the researcher to identify variances between settings or individuals
5. Select those with whom the researcher is most likely to develop a good relationship, to enable them to gather useful data.

Each of these five goals was considered when selecting participants for the present study. Participants were deliberately approached to seek include a broad range of ethnicities and backgrounds (goals 1 and 2 within the final sample). For example, during a recruitment discussion (via email) with a potential participant, I described how his ethnicity and background would be a useful addition to the

study, encouraging him to participate. Towards the end of data gathering, men with academic progression issues were deliberately targeted, as the sample already included a high proportion of men with little or no progression problems (goal 3). Participants came from seven different universities because this provided a range of different types of universities and programme styles (see above section, and goal 4). As a social worker for over 15 years, and an academic teaching social work students for over 8 years, this population appeared to be one I would be able to develop a good relationship with, suggesting them as a useful group to recruit (goal 5).

In order to gain as diverse a range of experiences, this study recruited both men with *and without* progression problems. This was foremost to gain a rounder view of the social world of the participants and to provide a varied array of accounts to help understand their experience. It was expected that men without progression problems could describe ways they manoeuvred the course, and provide explanations about the ways men could be successful on social work courses.

Because this study focussed on *men's* progression, and was not comparing men's to women's progression, it was necessary the sample included only men as participants. By interviewing men to gain their accounts, it was expected this would allow them to describe their experiences and how these related to progression. These accounts were used to construct a nuanced set of views about men's experiences and progression. A further reason was to foreground the voices of men social work students, often missing from experiential studies of social work students; for example, two UK studies exploring the experiences of social work students make no mention of how many men were included, and did not contextualise any findings using gender (Preston-Shoot and McKimm 2012; Woodward and Mackay 2012), one only acknowledged the sample contained 'mostly women' (Woodward and Mackay 2012, p.1101). If the sample from the present study included women students, this might have provided useful

information, but would have encouraged comparisons between men and women's progression experiences. This study's more specific aim to understand men's progression required the engagement of men, and the solicitation of their views and experiences.

Men Students as 'Hard-To-Reach' Participants

During the present study, this population proved 'hard-to-reach' as a group, which was unexpected. Recruiting enough men to provide a robust sample was challenging for a variety of reasons. The selected programmes were helpful in disseminating calls for participation, but several courses had fewer than five men on their programme during the recruitment phase. Because of this low number, a majority (or entirety) of the available men needed to agree to participate to recruit enough participants to provide a robust sample. Course leaders were very co-operative by sending out several requests for participation. However, when approaching those men in a course that fit the sampling parameters (such as being in either second or third year), most available did not respond to invitations, presenting a further challenge. These issues required repeated recruitment attempts. In addition, some men with progression issues that confirmed interest in joining the study did not attend their interview, which required further focussed recruitment attempts to gather accounts from other men who were experiencing academic challenges. Each of these challenges required repeated recruitment attempts to generate a diverse enough sample to gather robust data.

When attempting to recruit from hard-to-reach populations, many methodologists recommend the use of snowball sampling (Atkinson and Flint 2001). As a result, when recruiting participants for the present study participants were asked if they would be willing to speak to the other men on their course to encourage them to participate. Students are unlikely to have connections with many men social work students outside their course and as such this approach yielded a low response to further recruitment. Therefore, continued recruitment calls were made in each

university site, and sustained efforts were made to connect with all potential participants in order to attain sample size of suitable breadth. At each site, a short meeting was held with the relevant year groups to allow a short introduction and outline of the topic and participate expectations. These meetings were productive, as a number of additional students agreed to participate in the study after attending this introduction.

Sample

Twenty-one participants agreed to take part in this study. Qualitative interviews were conducted with social work student men from seven English universities. Participants were year two or three undergraduate social work student men. First year students were not recruited because it was expected a student during their first few months of the course would be less likely to provide a robust account of their course experience. In addition, they would still be acclimatising to the university and have not had time to have many progression issues, including not having had any placement experience. The following section includes two tables providing more detail about participant student demographic information.

Basic Demographic Information

Participant age ranged from 20 to 47 years old. Participants were from diverse backgrounds of educational experience, with most completing college-level Access courses before studying social work, with only four having completed A-levels directly before enrolling at university. The majority were White British (n=15; 71%), with six (29%) from Black or Ethnic Minority backgrounds. One participant gave his ethnicity as 'British', but appeared from external appearance to be either dual heritage or Black British. The most recent data (2013-14) for social work students, collected by HESA and analysed by Skills for Care (2016), suggest similar total ratios of ethnicity in the general social work student population, with 70% White British social work students, and 30% BME background. Participants included a mix of 1st generation and non-1st generation

students, with the majority from non-1st generation university families. Ten student participants had children, and eleven did not. Three participants were single fathers, with two having sole custody of their children. Ten student participants' identified progression issues that became apparent following later data analysis. These issues ranged from academic writing issues (resulting in failed assessments), failed placements or modules, and suspension or withdrawal from the course. These basic demographic details are represented in Table 4, below.

Table 4 Basic Demographic Information

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Age | Range & mean | 20-47 ($\mu = 29$) |
| 1st Generation university student | 1 st | n = 13 |
| | Not 1 st | n = 8 |
| Ethnicity | BME | n = 6 |
| | White British | n = 15 |
| Parenting | Children | n = 10 |
| | No children | n = 11 |

Student Demographic Information⁶ and Progression Issues

The table on the following page (Table 5) outlines in more detail participant student demographic details, and includes any progression issues identified during their interview. It describes participants age, ethnicity, 1st generation status, children, progression issues, course year, and previous educational qualification. As this study focuses on progression, the table presents participants identified through analysis with progression issues at the top, and those without secondary.

⁶ All the names used are pseudonyms, chosen to reflect as closely as possible the participant age and culture without breaching confidentiality.

Table 5 Detailed Student Demographic Information

| Pseudonym | Age | Ethnicity | Academic progression Issues | Children | 1 st Gen. | Course year | Previous education (e.g. Access courses, NVQ, A-Levels) |
|-----------|-----|---------------|-----------------------------|----------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Owen | 21 | White British | Yes | No | No | 2 | A-levels |
| Tom | 24 | White British | Yes | No | No | 3 | Diploma (related subject) |
| Yusuf | 25 | Dual heritage | Yes | No | 1 st | 3 | Access Course |
| Joey | 27 | White British | Yes | No | 1 st | 2 | Access course |
| Stuart | 34 | White British | Yes | Yes | 1 st | 3 | Access course |
| John | 34 | Black African | Yes | No | No | 2 | Access course |
| Simon | 36 | Black African | Yes | Yes | No | 2 | Access course |
| Anthony | 37 | British | Yes | Yes | 1 st | 2 | Access Course |
| Peter | 38 | Black African | Yes | Yes | No | 3 | Access course |
| Mark | 42 | Black African | Yes | Yes | 1 st | 2 | NVQ 3 (related subject) HND (unrelated subject) |
| Dean | 20 | White British | None | No | No | 3 | A-levels |
| Paul | 21 | White British | None | No | No | 3 | A-levels |
| Ben | 21 | White British | None | No | 1 st | 3 | A-levels |
| Will | 23 | White British | None | No | 1 st | 3 | Access course |
| Nick | 26 | White British | None | Yes | 1 st | 2 | Access course |
| Ian | 26 | White British | None | Yes | No | 3 | VRQ |
| James | 30 | White British | None | No | 1 st | 3 | Foundation degree (related subject) |
| Saban | 31 | White British | None | Yes | 1 st | 2 | NVQ 3 (related subject) |
| Jeremy | 38 | White British | None | Yes | 1 st | 3 | Access course |
| Mike | 41 | White British | None | Yes | 1 st | 2 | Access course |
| David | 47 | White British | None | No | 1 st | 3 | Access course |

Moving on from a description of the participants, the next section outlines the ethical considerations considered during this study, as well as describing how they were managed.

Ethical Considerations

There is some ambiguity as to which code of ethics takes primacy and which

should be followed when undertaking social work research (Dominelli and Holloway 2008). The code of ethics for social work and social care research ethics published by the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee (JUC-SWEC) (JUC-SWEC, n.d.) is specifically connected to social work and social care research. The ambiguity arises because, in addition to the JUC-SWEC code, social work professional groups publish codes of professional practice, which loosely mention research (BASW 2012), encouraging some social work researchers to use other more widely applied codes, such as those provided by the British Sociological Association or Social Research Association (BSA 2002; SRA 2003).

The JUC-SWEC code of ethics (JUC-SWEC n.d.) is drawn from Butler's (2002) paper, which in turn was developed from a series of workshop responses obtained from social work academics. They suggest using an approach that recognises wider social research ethics issues, but which is firmly rooted in the ethics of social work, including the drive for social justice, and recognition of an individual's right to autonomy (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Shaw (2008:401) admonishes social work researchers for lacking to acknowledge that 'applying ethics to social work research works in a fairly standard way from one project to another, and that such applications are largely initial business, sorted and settled in the early phases of the research.' The present study drew from these conceptualisations to guide the ethical principles that were applied throughout the course of the research programme. It used these social work ethics frames as a basis from which decisions were made, and re-engaged in considerations of ethical principles both before and during the data gathering phase. Ethical approval was awarded by the Department of Social and Policy Sciences Ethics Committee (see Appendix D) before any data was gathered.

In addition to departmental ethics approval, the use of several participant sites required 'continuous (re)negotiation of consent and access' (Hammersley and

Atkinson 2007, p.4). There were different access expectations for each site, requiring discussion and negotiation. Some universities expected further ethics/governance clearance from their own local ethics committee and, if required, this was sought and gained. After each university and course agreed access, individual participants' informed consent was then sought and obtained. This process typically involved a number of contacts with participants to outline the interview topic and participation expectations, usually via email. It was important to outline for potential participants in advance that whilst their identities would be protected, if they made statements which contravened the social work code of ethical practice (BASW 2012; HCPC 2012), these would need to be addressed with the course out of concern for current or future service users. For example, if a student had described concerning practice by social workers on placement, or of lecturers acting unfairly towards students that information may need to be passed to an external body (either the university or the HCPC). This possibility required that participants were forewarned and, specifically, that should such matters arise that these situations would require further action acting in best interests of the participant, the public and the profession. Unsurprisingly, none of the participants suggested this was problematic, given their programme of studying social work ethics and engagement with public-facing placement activities. All participants were provided with a copy of the approved study information sheet and all signed a consent form (see Appendices B and C) confirming their willingness to participate freely with the study. These processes helped provide assurance of participants' understanding of the parameters of their participation, and any potential impact for them.

Some of the participants were students experiencing academic difficulty, and the present study uses their experiences to inform social work education and knowledge of challenges and issues that such students experience and declare. It was important that the needs of participants were recognised during both the recruitment and interview phases of the study, in particular the potential need to access support services. The potential supports available in each university were

identified before data gathering and offered to students, if it was appropriate. For example, after one participant discussed his failed placement and the emotional effect this had on him, during the interview de-brief he was recommended to make contact with the university support services and his personal tutor to seek support for these difficulties.

Conducting a study with progression issues as a focus required interviewing some students with progression problems. An ethical consideration for these participants was any potential further impact of this study for their progression, by inadvertently increasing their concerns about their experience. Instead of causing further distress, it was hoped that these interviews could allow participants with progression difficulties a space to consider their experience, and possibly identify any underlying issues for their progression. Supporting this, several participants described finding the interview process helpful, such as Tom who stated: 'This was one of the reasons I ...err... wanted to do the interview - to work through that placement, and ...err... like figure out what happened.' After interviews, students that mentioned progression issues were provided the supports outlined above.

Issues of feminism and gender were further ethical concerns for this study, given its use of a feminist theoretical lens, and the gender of both researcher and participants as men. This research study uses a pro-feminist standpoint (Pease 2000) to inform the analysis of the resultant findings, and central to this framework is that women are benefited and not further oppressed by the impact of the study. A pro-feminist standpoint requires that the research process be deliberately motivated to destabilise gender inequality (see Chapter Two). This research sought to explore the possible improvement of men's achievement within social work education in part as a means to improve gender equality more widely, not as an arena for men to enact further employment dominance. The researcher's gender, as a man, and the participants', also men, is important to

retain as a potential source of bias and privilege which required consistent attention in the hope of not further exacerbating the current inequity experienced by some women and girls (Whitehead 2002). These issues are further addressed in the discussion (Chapter Eight) and recommendations (Chapter Nine) chapters of the present study.

Trustworthiness and Validity

There are a wide range of approaches proposed within the literature that have been applied to judge the effectiveness of qualitative studies (Freeman *et al.* 2007; Lincoln et al. 2011). These systems aim to assess how well a given study interprets the participant's world. Different ways of judging quality in qualitative research are needed compared to those required to assess quantitative research (Shenton 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the term *trustworthiness* as a useful way of considering the rigor of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers regularly use a number of ways to show the trustworthiness of their studies. These have been collated by several authors (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Maxwell 1996; Merriam 1998) and include: member checking; triangulation; thick description; peer reviews; and external audits. This study used several of these to improve the trustworthiness: triangulation, member checking, thick description, and peer review.

The data for the present study were gathered between May 2013 and March 2016, a considerable length of time for field work, and displays a sustained length of engagement with participants. This lengthy data gathering phase was because of two reasons: firstly, because of the challenges in recruiting a broad and diverse sample (as the men proved 'hard-to-reach'); and secondly, because after the first phase of data gathering, some preliminary data analysis was conducted and showed further data were needed. Because some of the themes were not as clear as needed, it was decided that further data were needed to achieve data saturation. As a result, a further round of participants were recruited

and their data merged with the initially gathered data, and data analysis continued. This further data helped clarify the themes found, and provided additional assurance about the validity of the findings. A further claim for valid findings is that the data were gathered from seven different programmes (sample areas), a version of location triangulation (Hammersley 2008). During analysis, this study also sought *disconfirming evidence* (Creswell and Miller 2000), a further method of validity similar to triangulation, where the researcher returns to the data with initial theories or concepts in an attempt to find confirming or disconfirming data. This approach was used during data analysis to identify and strengthen the findings.

The participants were sent preliminary findings to seek their feedback. This is called 'member checking' in the literature, and is often called 'the most crucial technique for establishing credibility' (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p.314) in a qualitative study. Early findings were raised during later interviews to test out their veracity with participants. For example, several early interviews suggested concerns about allegations when on placement, and this was discussed with later participant interviews.

Peer debriefing was undertaken by presenting the preliminary findings at relevant academic conferences (Schaub 2014; Schaub 2015b), and at University of Bath Department of Social and Policy Sciences postgraduate seminars, gaining valuable peer feedback. This feedback informed the early stages of analysis by suggesting synergies between themes and different theories. The interview schedule was piloted with three social work students and an academic, this process enabled the interview schedule to be refined and improved the interview technique.

Data Analysis

This study used Braun and Clarke's (2006) version of thematic analysis to analyse the interview data. Thematic analysis is often suggested as 'the most common approach to analysis of data in the social sciences' (Roulston 2001, p.280). Thematic analysis is helpful in studies where the text originates from arranged conversations (as here), because they are not 'naturally occurring talk'. Thematic analysis is able to generate an understanding of the experience of the individual, whilst also gaining a broader explication of social processes. It can 'be a method that works to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of "reality"' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.81). Engaging with the presented situation and with the wider social contextual processes is of benefit to research such as is required the present study, because it provides a more in-depth explanation of the phenomenon and its context. Geertz (1974) recommends 'dialectical tacking' between experience-near and broader social concepts; this study engages with individual student experiences as a way of understanding broader social issues such as gender and education. Qualitative data analysis is not regimented but should be bespoke to the specific nature of the project and the data (Rapley 2011). This flexibility makes this approach applicable to a wide range of research, and was useful for this context.

The first stage of thematic analysis required the transcripts were read through repeatedly for coherence and familiarity (including creating initial comments), and then *coded* by 'aggregating the text... into small categories of information, ...and then assigning a label to the code' (Creswell, 2007, p. 184). These 'chunks of text' are the building blocks of qualitative data analysis. These codes were not attempting to simply re-present the data, but to capture the essence of what was meant, and allowed extraneous information to be set aside. For the present study coding was undertaken by identifying an element in the data and distilling it to a code, before attempting to interpret what this might mean (Boyatzis 1998). This allowed the large amount of data to be organised, and to develop themes from

the range of interview transcripts. It was during this initial stage that it appeared necessary to gather further data, and a further phase of data gathering took place.

The transcripts were again read through specifically to identify corroborating or *disconfirming evidence* (as noted above) to more fully expand and refine the codes. In addition, Ryan and Bernard's (2003) advice was followed, by, as they suggest, 'pawing through' data to identify these events: repetitions; localised (indigenous) terminology; metaphors/analogies; transitions; similarities/differences; linguistic connectors and missing data. Repeated readings of the transcripts assisted the researcher to glean relevant narratives from the transcripts and to sift them into preliminary codes. This repeated reading of the transcripts was to begin an initial synthesis and to identify similarities and differences between the accounts.

During the 'pawing through', it became necessary to repeatedly refine, combine and re-combine codes to provide coherence. It was important during this phase to retain a focus on men's *progression* issues, as much of the data covered a range of their experiences. It was helpful to consider how each code (and nascent themes) could be potentially related to progression, and whether women might *potentially* experience these as well. This helped create a more refined range of codes and groupings leading to themes.

These refined codes were then merged in a series of steps to form understandable categories or *themes*. To do this, the codes and possible themes were all written on One Sheet Of Paper (OSOP), which allows the codes to be easily moved into groups but allows the original, underlying complexity to be retained (Ziebland and McPherson 2006). These themes were then reviewed to determine their 'fit' with the dataset, with a basic thematic diagram created to help identify any relationships between them. The themes were further refined to

encourage connections and initial suppositions. An important note throughout this process was to remain open to serendipitous analytic turns (Rapley 2011). These ‘hunches’ were often embryonic ideas that were emerging and, with continued scrutiny, developed into themes that were helpful in developing the thesis and its subsequent conclusions.

These initial themes were repeatedly refined during this stage of the analysis. Two different mechanisms were used to develop the initial themes into a coherent set of findings. First, the codes and initial themes were placed on movable pieces of paper, and placed on a large table. This allowed for them to be moved easily, and distilled the findings by identifying codes that ‘fit’ more coherently with other themes. This process also highlighted those codes that were unrelated to progression. During this phase 18 nascent themes were identified. These themes were confirmed with a further review of the transcripts to ensure robust validity of the findings.

Second, a supervision session was used to identify and refine the themes using a similar mechanism on a large whiteboard. This phase was useful as a peer review exercise. This phase produced nine themes. This process, whilst laborious, allowed for the data to be sifted into those findings that appeared likely that both men *and women* might experience (see Chapter Six), and those findings that appeared to relate specifically to men’s experiences and their progression. As this latter was the focus of the study, these findings were foregrounded, both during further refining and in the construction of the thesis. This was to ensure the findings provided a rich and detailed understanding of how men’s experiences could relate to their progression. In a final phase, these themes were further developed to provide coherence, and resulted in the five men-specific and three general themes outlined in Chapter Six. These various stages were essential to make sense of the range of data and varied accounts provided by the participants.

Limitations

Every study has limitations, and it is important to be cognisant of these during the process to ensure the findings are presented with proportionate cautions. To consider men's progression issues on social work programmes, programme structures and approaches could have been compared. Exploring this data would have allowed for any differences in progression issues to be viewed in the context of the course approach. However, these differences in course approach were not examined in the present study, with the focus being placed instead on eliciting participant experiences and their perceptions. As a result, whilst there is some contextual information provided about the course, the differences between the curricula and course approach have not been compared, instead considering if men from different courses described different experiences.

A further limitation is the sample's purposive selection and small size. Participants were recruited from as broad a range as possible, but a random sample would have provided additional quantitative data that could have been generalised to the wider general student population. However, whilst being of interest, this data would not have provided insight into the perceptions and in-depth experiences of the participants, and would not have been appropriate to fit within the interpretivist philosophy used in this study.

Because the sample included men that did not have progression problems, a further limitation must be acknowledged. The study did not only interview men that acknowledged progression issues. Whilst this is a limitation, it was expected that men with good progression could help identify ways to successfully complete a social work course. Secondly, these men were included to ensure this study was not additionally punitive to men with progression problems, as focussing on them could be perceived as compounding their issues. Practically, men who perform more poorly were expected to be less likely to engage in general, and therefore less likely to participate in this study. As has been previously

discussed, this population proved more 'hard-to-reach' than expected, and only recruiting men with difficulties would likely have made recruiting a robust sample even more challenging.

Recruiting women social work students or social work academics would have provided data to corroborate or counter men's experiences, and including them in the sample was considered. Women's or academic's accounts, however, would have not contributed to an interpretivist understanding of *men's* experiences, and would have instead provided counterpoint viewpoints. It was important to identify and explore men's experiences from their own accounts, and foregrounding their voices to help understand the progression issues. As a result, this study elected to recruit only men students, but acknowledges this as a limitation.

Previous studies include retrospective accounts of men's course experiences from former students (Cree 1996; Parker and Crabtree 2014). The participants recruited to these earlier studies may have provided a more contextualised experience, as they are no longer studying. Because the present study concentrated on progression issues, and sought to elicit participant experiences during their course, men that had already completed their course were excluded from the sample.

Conducting a single interview with participants is a further limitation, as a longitudinal study, following participants from before enrolment through their course experience would have provided a useful set of data. But the difficulties experienced in the recruitment of participants for a single interview suggests that seeking participation for a longitudinal study with men as participants would be very problematic.

Summary

This chapter presented the methods used in this study. The research questions were devised to address a gap in knowledge about social work student men's progression and experiences of studying social work. The methods were selected to address this gap, by providing qualitative accounts of their experience. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather these accounts, as they provide 'an opportunity to explore the meaning of the research topic for the respondent' (Qu and Dumay 2011, p.241). The research question required an interpretivist approach, allowing for participants' responses to be interpreted to understand the phenomenon. Interpretivist studies often start with a loosely structured range of interview questions (Thomas 2011), and this study drew on the literature to create an interview schedule which needed to be refined through a pilot process. The interview questions were refined even further during the data gathering process to address earlier interviews struggling to describe progression issues.

As previous studies have mostly used retrospective accounts, and given the present study's focus on experience and progression, men were recruited during their social work course. Students were also selected as a population to gather their experiences during a portion of what Goffman (1963, p.36) would call their 'moral career', the phase when it might be possible they become aware of their possible stigma. The study deliberately sought to gain as diverse a range of participants as possible (Gobo 2004) to more fully understand the progression issues for social work student men. One way of providing a diverse range of experiences was to select a diverse range of multiple universities. In addition, men from a range of ethnicities and backgrounds were recruited and interviewed. Because of the small numbers of men in most programmes, it was challenging to find enough men to create a robust set of accounts, requiring several rounds of recruitment and a long period of data gathering. As a result, the participants could be considered 'hard-to-reach', which was unexpected.

Ethical issues were considered throughout the study. During the research design phase, gender of researcher and participants was considered, influencing and informing interview construction and theoretical bases. Ethical approval was sought from a range of universities, and negotiation with participants required some ongoing discussion about their rights and implications of participation. Given the topic, any participant describing academic difficulty without appearing to know where to seek help was provided with relevant options of where to seek support after the interview. The study used strategies to improve trustworthiness and validity. Triangulation, member checking and peer review were used to improve the validity of the findings. These helped refine the themes found, and ensure they accurately represented the men's accounts.

This study proceeded to analyse the interviews using thematic analysis, drawing on the work of Ryan and Bernard (2003) and others (Creswell, 2007; Rapley, 2011; Ziebland & McPherson, 2006) in order to provide a robust analysis of the interview data. The next chapter outlines the themes and findings that were developed following analysis of interview data.

CHAPTER SIX: Findings

Introduction

Previous chapters outlined a range of literature sources that explored men's experience at university as well as men's relationship to the social work profession. They also described the research methods used in the present study. Chapter Six presents findings from the analysis of 21 participant interviews.

This chapter begins with a re-cap of the research questions. Then, general comments from participants about student experience are provided. This is presented first to provide a context for the following, more specific, findings, outlining participant descriptions of general social work student experience (many of which are likely be similar to women students' experience). Because the study set out to ask men their views about their experiences, there is a need to privilege their voices here. As a result, the majority of the chapter presents issues specific to men that may have an impact on their progression are presented.

Data analysis found that participants believe men social work students experience different issues than women during their course. These issues are discussed as a series of themes that appear, for some men, to potentially combine and impact progression. These men-specific issues are: not feeling wanted in social work profession; feeling men (and they) may not be 'natural' social workers; feeling silenced and unable to explore ideas during discussions; a need to protect themselves (including not seeking help); and disengagement from their classmates and their course. These issues were not experienced as a simplistic step-by-step process readily identified by participants, but seem to be more complicated. They appear to occur in layers and may coincide with other, more general, issues. For some men, these burdens may combine and hindered progression. It is important to note that all participants described more than one

of these issues, but eleven of the men interviewed had no progression issues. This suggests even men without progression problems experience some of the challenges found here. There were a number of participants, however, that described several issues, and these numerous combined factors appeared connected to progression problems.

To re-cap, this study examines the following research questions:

Why are there greater progression problems for men than for women in social work courses in England?

- 1. How does men's social work progression relate to men's general experience in education?*
- 2. How do the progression issues experienced by men in social work compare to other WMO professions?*
- 3. What are the progression characteristics for other minority groups in social work?*
- 4. What are men's experiences of studying social work, and can these experiences help us understand their progression problems?*

In the following sections of this chapter, when words are removed from direct participant quotes, they are replaced with ellipses (...); when words are inserted for clarity, they are surrounded by square brackets [], and when there are pauses occur in the speech, these are shown by double ellipses (... ...). All names used are pseudonyms. When participants are quoted for the first time, relevant demographic information is outlined to help contextualise the data. Identifying characteristics have been changed, but pertinent items are included, particularly where they help illuminate the findings.

General Student Experience issues

Twenty-one undergraduate social work student men were interviewed for this study, from seven different university sites. All participants were in year two or three of their course at the time of the interview. A prevalent finding was that the students generally described the course as being difficult. They also frequently discussed the difficulty of managing their time, and believing this aspect was important to their succeeding on the course. Lastly, a number of participants described financial concerns, and the pressures of financially providing for their families. This financial worry resulted in a number of participants working during their course, with some suggesting this could have negatively impacted their progression. These issues are likely to be similar to women's experience, so are presented here as contextual background, rather than findings specifically related to men's progression. Because this study did not also interview women social work students, their relation to women's experiences is a supposition.

Many of the participants described their course experience as challenging, finding it difficult to manage the competing coursework demands. Ian, a young single father, said: 'It's been a baptism of fire! ...It's such a vast area I find it impossible to master any aspect of it.' A majority of other participants related similar experiences, with several suggesting they were surprised at how difficult the course was. Ian described feeling both challenged as well as excited by the programme, as did most other participants. A number of the participants suggested they, and other students, discussed the difficulties caused by the demands of their course. David, a 47 year-old White British man with a previously successful career, and nearly at the end of his third year, said: 'We had conversations about how everyone is super stressed out, about how they don't know what they're doing. It doesn't make sense.' (David). Several participants suggested they made significant personal changes to their lives to better enable them to concentrate on their course. A few described moving back in with their parents, in part to make it easier to use them as support for

childcare. Participants often described family support as 'essential' to their success on the course, allowing them the space and time to concentrate on studying the course content and attending placements several days a week. The support of partners or spouses was identified as essential in being able to find time to study and undertake placements, although there were a number of participants that described relationship troubles or dissolution that occurred whilst they were studying. Several participants suggested the demands of the course brought relationship issues to the foreground. Hearing students suggest they find a university course challenging is unsurprising, and if this study interviewed women social work students, it is likely they would make similar statements. It would also be expected that women would suggest they depended on family and spousal support to enable them to undertake a social work course successfully.

Following from the above descriptions of a challenging course experience, most participants identified time management as a general concern. Eleven participants had children, and several of them frequently discussed the impact of being a parent on their time management and the allocation of protected study time. Most participants described their experiences of managing time as an important part of their course experience. They generally described feeling time management was essential to successfully manage the competing demands of a busy course. Jeremy, a White British man and 38 years old at the time of our interview, said: 'At times [it's been] very difficult as I have a young family and a wife who works, so time management and that kind of thing has been tricky.' Participants frequently described needing to carefully manage a number of responsibilities, and often found family and course responsibilities difficult to juggle successfully. They generally described considering a range of options to resolve these competing demands, like using extended family support to help with family responsibilities. A few participants with children described timetable changes difficult to manage, particularly when they thought any changes did not take into account caring responsibilities. They explained preferring the course timetable was set up in 'blocks' of time, instead of spread out throughout the

week. Women students very likely share these concerns as well; many will also have family responsibilities, and, as women, would likely have a larger responsibility for childcare than men.

Financial responsibility was frequently mentioned as a concern. Specifically, participants with families often spoke about being anxious about providing financially for them. An illustrative example is Jeremy, who during the interview described some decisions he took based on the ability to provide for his family. He described how he and his partner borrowed money from his mother, and he would not have been able to remain on the course (and not earning a wage) were it not for this support. He discussed financial issues as a pressing concern:

‘We have managed it through student finance which has been pretty difficult, but I have had help from my mother, she has helped bridge certain gaps in income. Not massively, I am talking a few hundred pounds here and there over the last three to four years. I think without family support we would have been in serious debt! So, yes, it has been difficult.’
(Jeremy)

His description was a common experience amongst the accounts, with participants frequently discussing being a student had increased their financial pressure. Jeremy’s decision not to work during his degree allowed him more time to study, thereby likely improving his progression. Another participant, Anthony, suspended studies during his first year. At the time of the interview, he was a 37-year-old man at the start of his second year (after re-starting and completing his first year), with two young boys he was only able to see during the weekends. He thought part of the reason he needed to suspend studies was because he worked during his initial attempt at a first year:

Jason: ‘So you were working in the first year... .. Do you think that was part of the reason [for suspending studies]?’

‘Definitely. That is an extra thing, it had a big impact on my time [for studying].’ (Anthony)

These examples suggest some participants made difficult financial decisions, considering the impact of working for their progression. Most of the participants

expressed concern about the impact of studying on their financial situation. For some participants, they thought working caused academic difficulties, because it reduced the time they could spend on studying. Concerns about financial issues were described frequently as a significant factor for participants.

The above general experiences are outlined to provide a general context, and to identify that the findings includes a broad range of issues described by participants, some of which appeared to be not directly related to being men. These above concerns: the difficulty of the course, time management and financial issues; could likely be experienced by women *and* men. Participants described some other issues that could be linked to their gender as men, and the following sections outline these as themes. These were identified during analysis as likely to be specifically experienced by some men, and, additionally, relating to participant's course progression.

Feeling Unwanted by the Social Work Profession

Participants' narratives frequently included descriptions that suggested they felt men were not welcome in social work, and were unwanted by the profession. Most participants described during the interview a memory of feeling they, as men, were out of place in the social work profession. Participants spoke frequently spoke about situations or examples that encouraged them to feel they were unwelcome. Yusuf was in his final year and a 25-year-old dual heritage man at the time of our interview. He told me he thought other people thought of social work as a women's occupation:

'I can see why some men might feel as though, "You know what, I'm in the wrong profession". From the very beginning they feel that they are not welcome into the profession. And maybe that's why there are low numbers, and all of that? And maybe that's why some people drop out - because they think they are surrounded by a lecture theatre full of women,

a lot of the lecturers are women, and they are only talking about women's issues.' (Yusuf)

During our interview, Yusuf described a range of concerns with the focus of his social work programme; he suggested its concentration on 'women's issues' made him, and other men, feel they were not supposed to be in the profession. Peter provided another example from his first placement. He was a 38-year-old Black African married father of two young children, and nearly at the end of his third year. He described how his placement manager's staff and service users told him they did not want a man on placement with them, and feeling upset when she told him:

'The manager told me, "I specifically asked for a male student."... Every staff have rejected it, and all the service users have said they didn't want a male student.... The staff said they would prefer a female student, because they've always had female social work students. The manager told me they don't welcome me, but she will support me. Anything happening, I should inform her. She had specifically asked for me, so she's going to see me through. So I was kind of empowered by that assurance. It was very hard. I wasn't comfortable. I don't know who is my friend, who isn't my friend. The first few weeks was very, very challenging.' (Peter)

Peter presented this situation during the interview as a defining experience of his social work course. He found it upsetting that the service users and the staff responded negatively to a man coming to their placement. This placement was a community service for people with long-term health issues. It did not have a gender-specific focus, like a women's refuge, but they told him it was not appropriate for a man. He was worried about how he would be accepted by the team and undertake placement tasks after hearing the staff and service users did not want a man. He felt this situation was unfair, and that they should not have originally refused a man as a student, but it did contribute to him feeling like he did not belong in social work, and that he was going 'against the grain' by becoming a social worker. These participants felt these situations created a sense the social work professionals did not want men to enter their domain, as it is more traditionally for women, and men's entrance could be problematic.

Participants generally felt placements were more 'gendered' than their classroom experiences. Several described feeling more noticeable when on placement because there were even fewer men on placement than in class. The next two examples are from different men describing their placement experience, and suggesting how they felt placements were 'gendered':

'It was even less men, in a sense, as I was the only man on a team of 10 people... ..I suppose that's what a female would feel like if she was in a workplace with all men. It's that cliquy, and you feel an outsider.' (David)

'The fact that I was a man was highlighted straight away, "Oh - we have a man". That made me conscious of it...that it is an "us and them thing", and conscious of my gender.' (Ian)

David likened his experience to how a woman might feel similarly in a typically masculine setting, his use of the term 'outsider' seems apt, feeling part of a team on placement but separated from colleagues by his gender. He was a 47-year-old White British man, almost finished with his degree. Ian was younger, a 26-year-old White British single father. He had moved back to live with his retired parents for support to help him 'concentrate' on his social work course. He described himself as 'not an Alpha male', and appeared to have an awareness of the impact of gender, and gender roles on people, discussing these throughout the interview. When participants described their placements, they often felt their colleagues and teams were not expecting men students, and their gender made stand out, as if men were not usually in these settings.

A few participants recounted more negative experiences, some even believing certain women social workers and students were hostile to men entering the profession. Tom felt he experienced resistance from women social workers on placement, and thought this may be because of their discomfort with men in the social work role. He was 24 years old, and nearly completed his third year, but had to re-take a failed placement. He is a softly spoken gay man who described being very shaken by his placement experience in a statutory children's team. He

had conversations with other professionals that made him consider his placement supervisor might be resistant to men coming into social work, stating:

‘I’d worked with people who’ve worked in health care professions such as nursing, midwifery... these were all women and they’d said, “Oh, sometimes, if you work in a female dominated profession... Oh, we’ve seen it before, where women are particularly sceptical of men going in to that profession, that they’d trained to do, where there’s more women than men”.’ (Tom)

Tom went on to explain he found this situation upsetting and that it made him feel uncomfortable, and felt intimidated by his supervisor:

‘They become, sometimes, *territorial but in a way that it’s not noticeable...* ...I think on like reflecting about it, I think, maybe, that was the case, especially with my supervisor... But in a very like non-threatening, non-intimidating way, even though I’d felt intimidated... I think I felt it more than I could identify it, if you know what I mean.’ (Tom)

This placement experience had a significant emotional impact for him, and increased his feeling of being out of place. In addition to placements, a small number of participants described experiencing negativity about men in classroom experiences. Nick, for example, was a 26-year-old White British man who had worked in social care for almost 10 years before starting his social work degree. He was married with two young children, but said he thought some women lecturers teaching on his course showed they were resistant to men coming into social work:

‘Maybe some of the older [lecturers] are a little bit institutionalised and think that male social workers aren’t right. But I don’t know, it’s an observation that came to mind that’s made my experience a bit more uncomfortable.’ (Nick)

He described this issue in the interview, but felt it would not help his progress to raise it with an academic. He explicitly advised these feelings made him uncomfortable and suggested older women lecturers may be inclined to be less accepting of men social workers rather than other, younger academics. Mentioning age and ‘institutionalisation’ intimates he thought more conservative individuals might be more resistant to accepting men in social work. Whilst many of the participants explained a situation where they felt unwelcome, only a few

described a responses that made them feel intimidated. These few participants often believed these situations occurred because they were men, and because some social workers or lecturers thought they (and other men) did not belong in social work.

Concerns that Men are not ‘Natural’ Social Workers

Following from a sense that they were unwelcome in social work, with concerns that men were not ‘usual’ in social work, many of the students’ accounts included feeling uncomfortable in social work. Most participants suggested they thought society considers social work as a woman’s job, because women were more naturally suited to ‘caring’ roles, finding this knowledge uncomfortable. Several participants said they did not feel men innately possessed some of the skills to be a social worker, but believed that women did. They believed men needed to work harder to compensate for women’s innate abilities. This meant the participants, as men, often felt uncomfortable, because they were not as suited to social work as women, as described in the two excerpts presented below.

‘I was worried because people think [social work] is a caring profession and I don’t want to sound oppressive to women or anything like that, but the fact that women seem to be more caring possibly than men, because perhaps with having children?’ (Mike)

‘They are not going to look at social work and say, “Look, admire that man”, maybe it’s because it’s a caring role. It may be more feminine than other jobs.’ (Dean)

These two examples outline descriptions similarly provided by most of the participants, and related by two different men both suggesting that society considers women as being more suited to social work. Dean was 20 years old and half way through his final year of the social work course when I interviewed him, having had a ‘traditional university experience’. Mike was a 41 year-old single father of two children, and in year two of his degree. Most participants described thinking that women were more appropriate as social workers, and

they sometimes, as a result, felt there were elements of the social work role they would struggle to undertake.

Feeling men were ill-suited to social work was described frequently across the interviews, with most participants mentioning at least one experience. They presented these situations as unsurprising, something they assumed I would already know about. Participants considered it common knowledge that women were more inherently able social workers. For example, when explaining the research topic to Saban, a 31-year-old White British second year student, he said he had an immediate understanding of the purpose, from his own experience:

Jason: *You knew that my topic was about male social work students in social work?*

'Yes, I did, yes. Um.... the thing is, straightaway, like, the topic made sense. Because there are hardly any men on the course and my first placement was in a school. Once again, hardly any men.' (Saban)

Jason: Yes?

'And... ...I've worked for a couple of companies, and I still do, and there's hardly any men in the caring aspect there... ...' (Saban)

Jason: Yes... ...

'And my current placement in the statutory setting, there's a bit more men but compared to women; there's not that many men there. So it's a topic that makes sense. Whether... ...I don't know if men feel they can't fit in the caring role or... ...you know... ...it's something that they feel like, is, something that women should be doing, I don't know. But I could understand that thinking because I guess in history, probably women have been more dominant in social work.' (Saban)

In this excerpt he described an underlying sense that social work seems to be only associated with women. He is more resolute when explaining the topic was immediately apparent ('straightaway, the topic made sense'), but when trying to explain why he thought the topic was so apparent, he begins to struggle ('something they feel like, is, something that women should be doing, I don't know'). He relates the feeling that social work is for women, but when unpacking this idea of his place in the profession with him, he used qualifying statements ('I

don't know'). He uses the term 'caring', a term used throughout many of the interviews, sometimes as an apparent substitute for 'feminine'.

Participants expressed these descriptions of social work as 'unnatural' for men as part of an understood social perception. Ian explained that he thought society was uncomfortable with men in social work, and how he and other men absorbed this belief:

'Comments like, "You don't get many men doing social work. It's mostly women who do that."' (Ian)

Jason: *So you got that from people?*

'Just general comments again and I think a lot of it is the view of social work. People didn't know about it much or if they did, it was like, 'That's mostly women doing it.' So I think that's where – it's sort of garnered throughout my life. It's interesting there are two roles, A) one of the roles is of you as a male or the identity as a male, professional social worker which is a female field and B) the role of you as a man in society (whether a social worker or not) and the view of certain women towards you. And I think to me that was the hardest. There are two distinct identities that women or people will have an opinion of you being a man in both as a social worker and [in] society and I think subconsciously we all pick it up at certain points.' (Ian)

The above excerpt appears jumbled, as Ian described a situation he appeared to be processing during our conversation. He felt that there were two issues that may arise for men social workers (and students): first, men (and he) are unusual in a profession that is mostly women; second, that some women hold negative views of all men. He suggests this was not direct ('I think subconsciously'), but also thought it was very difficult for him ('that was the hardest'). Whilst he did progress well, this first placement experience appeared to be important to him, as he described his experience in detail. What is useful for this study is how he extricates the identities of himself as a social worker and himself as a man, but suggests his entrance into social work may trouble both identities. The pervading social concept of a social worker as a woman seemed indelibly linked for most participants, with Nick suggesting this situation as one that made him aware he was out of place:

‘A lot of people seem to picture a female social worker. Like when we have a “Design an Ideal Social Worker” task, everyone seems to draw a woman.’ (Nick)

The fact that social work is so clearly associated with women meant that many participants, at some point in their degree experience, felt uncomfortable because they were men and undertaking a role assumed as more appropriate for a woman.

Importantly for the present study, thinking women being more appropriate for social work meant participants often felt men did not have the right to hold a view or the skills to become social workers. For example, when asked about assessing parenting, one participant without children suggested: ‘I don’t have the right to do it.’ (Paul). Surprisingly, Paul had parents who had been foster carers throughout his childhood, but even with this background thought because he was not a parent meant he could not competently assess parenting. He was a 21-year-old final year student that had been progressing well, and was expecting to achieve a First, suggesting even men progressing well may experience these doubts about their suitability for the social work profession. Similarly, Joey, a 27-year-old single man, was worried about some parts of social work because he felt unequipped to assess parenting:

‘It’s a bit of a daunting thought if I got placed with children and families, and I tried to give support around parenting. It’s a double-edged sword: “Well - you’re a man and a gay man. What do you know?”. I don’t think I can do that. That concerns me a little bit.’ (Joey)

Joey previously worked as a domiciliary carer. He withdrew from his course after suspending studies for a year, but at the time of the interview was almost finished with his second year, and at that time had not decided yet to suspend studies. These participants suggested they were not inherently suited to social work tasks *because they were men*. They felt they did not have the experiences or ‘innate’ ability to undertake some developmental tasks that were part of becoming social workers.

Feeling less suitable than women for social work tasks was a productive discussion topic in the interviews. One participant described a conversation with his practice educator (PE) where he realised thinking social work would be more difficult for him, because he was a man:

‘She asked me what my plan was and what I thought of my impact on the families I worked with, and she said, “Have you thought about you being a man?” I guess with children and families it could be a bit more difficult. I think it was more difficult for me because of being a man.’ (Will)

Will was a 23-year-old White British man at the end of his third year at our interview. Many of the participants thought that their gender meant they were less suited to social work than women. Jeremy, a 38-year-old White British man, suggested because men were more prevalent abusers than women, this meant men would find it more difficult to be social workers:

‘It’s difficult for women to become social workers as well, but when we are talking about sexual abuse, we are talking about the man in the family, aren’t we?’ (Jeremy)

Not only did some participants feel uncomfortable because they were not innately qualified for the profession, most participants thought their gender affected how they could engage in discussions about social work topics. One example was provided by Saban, who said men were less able to engage in much of the social work curriculum:

‘Also there’s a lot of things that are covered around children’s work... We haven’t got children so it’s harder to relate to that subject.... You can’t add too much; you want to but you can’t talk from experience.’ (Saban)

Jason: Do you think those women that are on the course that don’t have children have an easier time of engagement with the topics around children?

‘I think so because there are a lot of older women that do not have children, [they] can relate to whatever level about the subject.’ (Saban)

This excerpt is useful, because Saban suggests that women, even a woman without children, are more able to discuss ‘a lot of things’ in the social work curriculum. He felt he (and other men) were not able to engage as fully as

women during discussions about these subjects. Other participants shared these concerns, describing experiences where they felt unable to take part in the conversation with peers because they were men, and the topics had become more feminine, meaning they had little or nothing to contribute.

Discomfort Exacerbated by Traditional Male Roles

For many participants, feeling innately unsuited to social work was exacerbated in situations that emphasised traditional male roles. These situations included working with children on placement, discussions about domestic violence, and when discussing men's oppression of women and children. Most participants described some of these situations, in one form or another, and a small number became upset when discussing these during the interview. These concerns were often presented as central to the participants' course experience, and re-affirmed for many participants the feeling that men were not 'naturally' able social workers. Some participants related their experiences to how they thought a woman might not have the same concerns, because of the perceived natural alignment between women, caring and social work.

Participants frequently mentioned feeling uncomfortable working with children; often suggesting their discomfort was because men were perceived to be more dangerous to children. This topic was the most frequently discussed during the interviews, with some participants spending much of the interview related to this topic. Jeremy, who described himself to service users as a 'safe male', thought it might be more challenging for service users to speak to him and other men as social workers, because service users may have experienced abuse (and because men were the predominant abusers):

'Yes, I think maybe more than other professions is where social care sits in that difficult area of people's lives where you are dealing with relationships and dealing with histories and stuff - to talk about them is difficult. It's difficult for women as well, but when we are talking about

sexual abuse, we are talking about the man in the family, aren't we?'
(Jeremy)

A number of participants mentioned a concern that they (and other men) were perceived as more dangerous than women. They frequently described thinking this meant becoming a social worker would be more difficult for them than for a woman. Men that did not have children discussed more concerns about working with children. Some participants were concerned other people could see them as a possible threat to either children or women. When explaining this concern, Owen said:

'If you hear about stuff going on, things like kids getting abused, it's more to do with men... really... ..like, things like... .. Jimmy Saville, you know, like famous people, taking advantage of kids, and stuff. Yeah, you don't hear of any women doing that sort of thing, people are going to be more suspicious of you.' (Owen)

At the time of our interview, Owen was a young second year social work student (21 years old), and had recently had his first placement abruptly suspended (a placement working with young people). Saban had similar concerns, and also did not have children. His parents had fostered a large number of children during his childhood, and he previously worked with adults with profound disabilities, but he did not describe thinking this background could help him undertake social work tasks more than other men. When speaking about his experience of being on placement in a school, he explained this setting made him more uncomfortable because being in a school meant he had to deal with physical contact with children. He was very uncomfortable about this, saying:

'I was in a school... ..Oh, I had an issue with myself, not an issue, but I wasn't comfortable with... ..um... ..holding some of the children's hands to begin with. Because I've never worked with children and all of a sudden, the culture is, whether you are a teacher or a TA [teaching assistant], you're generally holding the children's hands and you are walking somewhere, and... ..as a man... ..I didn't feel comfortable with that.' (Saban)

These situations highlighted the discomfort for participants, appearing to make them more aware of being men in a setting unusual for men. These experiences

also appeared to encourage them to feel less able to undertake expected tasks for a social worker, and several suggested thinking women would be more innately able to work with children, and it would be easier for women to become a social worker.

In comparison to the men without children, participants with children frequently described drawing on fatherhood when working with children and their families, although most suggested still feeling concerned about working around children. Of use to this present study, whilst using their experience as a father as a source to assess parenting several participants suggested they thought men without children would struggle to undertake these tasks. Jeremy provides a helpful example; he was a 38-year-old White British man who enrolled on a social work course after an industry job redundancy. He found being a father was useful when working with children, and drew on this background during these situations, but was also unsure how men without children performed these tasks:

‘There was one family I would relate back to my own children with small comments, like, “I know, I have a 10 year old as well!” I found that as a tool for empathy, quite useful... I don’t know how other people practice, but it worked for me.’ (Jeremy)

Domestic abuse discussions also heightened participants’ discomfort. Most participants described feeling more uncomfortable during sessions about domestic abuse. Being the only man (or one of only a few men) in the session made them more aware of their identity as a man, and they felt they ‘stood out’ in comparison with the women on the course. Stuart, a 34-year-old White British man, found being the only man in a session about domestic abuse uncomfortable. He described that he felt the teacher and students (all women) expected him to represent all men and that he should be able to provide a ‘male perspective’ about domestic abuse:

'I've been to a domestic violence course – 11 females and me, and two females running the course. It was all about domestic violence and that was, yeah, quite... ..They were very, trying to be welcoming but, by making the point that I was the only male there and I could give a male perspective,... ..err... ..probably made me feel more uncomfortable.'

(Stuart)

Stuart suggests that what made him uncomfortable was the sense that he should provide a 'male perspective', essentially that he should speak for all men. He felt picked out of a group because he was a man, and felt unprepared to explain the reasons why men might be violent. Participants described these situations made them feel singled out, as if there was a spotlight on them because they were a man, and they felt unprepared to respond under this scrutiny.

Almost all participants in this study mentioned domestic abuse discussions as situations where they felt selected out of the crowd, more exposed, because they were men amongst so many women. Simon presented this story about a class discussion:

Jason: *Did anyone have a conversation with you about being a man in practice?*

'We had that in class already - like female service users may have had domestic abusers, [or] raped by male family.' (Simon)

Jason: *So you had that conversation in class with the lecturers?*

'Yes, so, we were expecting that.' (Simon)

Jason: *What do you mean?*

'They spoke to the entire class but they single out the men.'

Jason: *How did they suggest you deal with those things?*

'Not really suggestions but thoughts to recognise where we come from and our position out there, so-called hierarchy. We like to think England is equal, but there is a system. So men are seen as powerful, so if you go to a home where a woman has been abused by a male family member, so, there is no way you will be able to work with them.' (Simon)

Several participants described similar situations, but Simon's excerpt is helpful, as it identifies several relevant elements illustrating some challenges participants expressed about domestic violence topics. He recounted a story about a class

discussion covering domestic abuse; other participants also highlighted these discussions as memorable and uncomfortable. Simon believed his gender was the reason men were not able to work with women that may have suffered domestic abuse. He felt he and the other men were 'singled out' because men are more powerful than women. This resonates with Stuart's excerpt where he described being the only man in the session, and where he felt he was seen by the other attendees as representing *all* men. Participants described these situations as if they highlighted their gender, and they were seen as a man, first, before every other identity, and found this experience made them feel uncomfortable.

Some participants also found domestic abuse issues on placement, and several suggested it presented difficulties for them. Anthony's interview provided an example of this concern. At the time of the interview, he was a 37-year-old man at the start of his second year (after re-starting and completing his first year). He suggested women service users could feel more threatened when a man comes to their home for a placement home visit:

'Difficult to say, I think the first thing to note, a male going into a house with a female she may feel intimidated straight away. There is an element, an unspoken thing, again the hostility.' (Anthony)

He describes how he would be identified as a man associated with all other men, and the woman may feel threatened as a result. He outlined this during a discussion about home visits, and suggested this as perhaps the first issue that could cause challenges for men social work students. Several participants described concerns that domestic abuse made it more difficult for them to be social workers, causing challenges for them that women did not have. Analysis revealed several participants felt spoiled by this association with other men, because men were described as being more likely to be violent, and were oppressive to women. These participants found it difficult to cope with feeling responsible for all men's behaviour, suggesting they did not feel they were violent or oppressive, and thought being linked to such negative associations incorrect.

Complicating this experience of spoilt association, one participant reacted differently, arguing the perception of men as more violent was inaccurate. Yusuf believed that men were also oppressed, and felt social work classroom discussions were difficult. He said:

'They [the women in class] are talking of female genital cutting, how women are trafficked. And some lecturers have made it clear that men are not oppressed, women are oppressed. And that makes us think that we're the only men in the room, and we're the oppressors, then. That's the feeling it gives us.' (Yusuf)

Directly after this exchange, I asked Yusuf how he felt this opinion ('men are oppressors') related to social work, and he launched into a passionate description of his experience of discussing these types of topics in class:

Jason: How do you think that squares with social work, then?

'Because, I think it would be foolish to say that social work is somehow, separate from society, social work *is* society. And so the ideas that people carry *in* society are the ideas that professionals, social work students carry in themselves, also.' (Yusuf)

Jason: What do you think the rest of the class was experiencing when you were going through this experience, what was the mood in the room like?

'That's the thing, as well. There are some that are followers, and they are willing to just follow an opinion. And there are some, quite a few of women on the course that are feminist, openly declared feminist. So as soon as something comes along like that, they jump on the bandwagon... .. And of course, you are surrounded by loads of women, pointing at you, saying, "Yeah, you know what? I think you are wrong - the lecturer is right, women are oppressed!". That's difficult, but I think because of my background, and I have faced some difficulty at least, some hardship that's made me a stronger person. So when it comes to conflict in all of this, I can just stand up to the group of women and say, "No, I still think you are wrong, and this is why!". When you explain something rationally, and I don't mean logic, logic is a piece of paper square; everything thereafter is paper, that's logic. I'm on about having a rational debate, and you prove an argument, and you either win or lose, but either way you have rational basis for your argument. You don't just think, "Okay, because women were killed previously... .." or, "Because women couldn't vote previously... ..", or whatever, that somehow women are the only ones that faced oppression. You said, "How did they experience it?" - I don't know, but I would assume it would be along the lines of that feeling of, that feeling of - I think it's part of the survival instinct. *When you feel that your gender is being attacked or anything is being attacked, you immediately defend yourself.* And I think

though, a lot of those women had to defend their gender and say, “Yeah, you know what, we are oppressed!”. It is difficult for men, because there’s not enough of us in the room to create that opinion, and push it forward and say, “Well, no, men are oppressed as well!”.’ (Yusuf)

Jason: *Would it have made a difference if there were more men in the room?*

‘Definitely, because then [the] men could have said, “There are 50 of us in the room - which one of us are you saying are the oppressors? Because you keep talking about ‘Men are this, women are oppressed’. We are all here, and we are social work students, tell us what we are doing wrong and we will try to change it.” Whereas if it’s just a few of us, well, you’re not even society! You can’t even represent society because there’s not enough of you. When you do research or a survey, you look at the number of people you can get from a diverse background. Now if you’ve only got four [male] students on the course it’s difficult to represent manhood or men generally.’ (Yusuf)

Throughout this description he was animated, and occasionally appeared angry about how he felt he had been treated. At the start of this excerpt, Yusuf outlines that social workers reflect the prevailing views of society, because the profession is made up of people from that same society. He was frustrated that he (and other men) was associated with negative characteristics connected to other men, and that men, in general, were identified as the main perpetrators of oppression. He did not note the difference between the examples used: the oppression of women involving FGM or trafficking; and the oppression of men using the different national age of retirement for men when compared to women. What is important for this study, and related to other participants’ experiences, is that Yusuf found this discussion upsetting, and thought it was replicated elsewhere in his undergraduate social work programme. He felt that he was unable to address this imbalanced opinion because there were so few other men on the programme to use for support. He thought if there were more men, they would help him more robustly defend the erroneous claims that men are society’s predominant oppressors. His description resonates with other participants’ experiences of ‘gendered’ topics (such as domestic abuse or working with children), and how these topics can exacerbate men’s sense of not being innately suited for social work.

Complicating the general difficulty described in previous excerpts, a few participants discussed ways they felt helped them manage domestic violence class sessions. Whilst they understood men were being discussed as a group, they appeared able to differentiate themselves from these 'other men', and refuted the shared responsibility for domestic violence. Paul, a 21-year-old young man, provided a useful example. He described feeling he needed to apologise for other men's behaviour when talking about domestic abuse, because he thought he was not like these men:

'We are a different type of men than those that are being discussed. And I think we need to accept that. I sometimes get the feeling that I need to apologise, and say, "You know what? Men are like that - men are more likely to be perpetrators of abuse and domestic violence." I almost get the feeling that I need to apologise and say, "I don't agree with it either, and I'm a man."' (Paul)

It can be tentatively suggested by Paul's and other participant descriptions, these few participants seemed to be trying to separate themselves from other men. They appeared to be attempting to balance the perpetration of violence by other men with their desire to work with vulnerable people. James identified that whilst he was able to detach from men as a group, that this may be difficult for some other men to do:

'It's a sense of you as a male, not you as an individual...which is fine, because I can accept that because males are the perpetrators of domestic violence nearly all the time, so I can kind of accept that... I think for a man doing the course, it can be quite challenging in terms [because] you're learning a lot about inequality, and the male place in that in terms of basically, hierarchy and women and things like that... ... That can not sit comfortably with some people.' (James)

In this excerpt James outlined how he understood that 'some people' might find such discussions difficult, and how they might find it a challenge. He also describes a sense of being associated with other men ('male place'). These examples show some men attempt to differentiate themselves from men in general, and appear to feel they need to apologise for the damage caused by them in order to be able to work as social workers. Even with these few participants describing some ways to manage these discussions, generally

participants described the topics of domestic abuse and children as sites of greater difficulty for them; they felt singled out, and these conversations created situations where their gender was highlighted, and they frequently felt less suited to social work because they were men. These topics exacerbated the feeling for some participants that men did not innately possess the attributes to be social workers.

Feeling Silenced

Most of the participants described feeling outnumbered by women on their course at some point, and suggested they sometimes felt unable to openly explore ideas during class discussions. The excerpt from Yusuf's interview above shows how he felt unable to respond easily because there were only four other men in his class. Participants frequently suggested the number of women and lack of other men made them feel as if they could not discuss difficult topics freely. As a result, several participants felt silenced by these experiences, because they felt their gender made them antagonistic to their classmates. Many participants described restricting their engagement during class discussions because they were worried their classmates may react negatively. They frequently described concerns that a mistake could result in reprisals from their classmates.

Most participants described they felt they needed to be careful when presenting their views in class, because they were men. John was a 34-year-old Black African man interviewed near the end of his second year; he felt he needed to be careful when speaking or he risked negative responses from the other (women) students:

‘... The male social workers, we always found it hard to get involved into things. I am in a class with three men. So if there's a debate and we have a view from a different perspective, you have to be really careful what

you're gonna say and how you are gonna say it, because you're going to have 28, 27 women coming at you.' (laughing) (John)

Jason: *And has that happened?*

'It has, it has. So many times, you know, in tutorials and debates or conversations that we're having, things that... ...You want to express your views, but it's hard!' (John)

The care he describes using in class discussions is of interest here, since it appears he thought it restricted his class and peer engagement ('found it hard to get involved'). He also mentions concerns that he may say something that causes a repercussion, and links this to feeling outnumbered by the women in the class. It was apparent from our discussion that he felt this situation happened throughout his course, but was not limited to one discussion, module or lecturer. These concerns for how to approach and manage these situations were reflected by most of the participants. Saban even suggested that his family relationships with women did not help him feel he could easily manage these gendered interactions:

'I've grown up with a lot of women in my life, I've got, like, four sisters and – I do feel like... ...yes, how can I put this, how can I articulate this... um... with the guys, I feel like it's easier to put yourself across and get your point, but with the women, I found that... ...they're very opinionated about things, which is great, because we're meant to be opinionated in this world, but you just have to be a bit more tactful around women in terms of - it can get a bit too sensitive... ...' (Saban)

Jason: *Okay... ...*

'On some of the subject matter... ...' (Saban)

Jason: *Can you give me an example?*

'Yes, let me think.... so.... um... just disagreeing with someone's viewpoint? And I think the guys that I would deal with, they're more... ...the way that they approach and take... ...for example, perhaps it can be seen as criticism when I've questioned someone, because I thought it felt it was... ...I saw it from a different viewpoint, but I felt like... ...from experiences with some of the women in the course, their body language has become slightly different, which I've noticed, negative, or their response has been not what I thought would be a discussion.' (Saban)

Jason: *Yes... ...*

'A bit sharpish...' (Saban)

Both excerpts show participants feeling concerned about speaking freely in class discussions, and these men suggested the women students had previously responded negatively to some attempts at engaging in the discussions. In one example, Saban appears to attempt to use his family relationships as a way to understand these situations. Participants described being aware class discussions could be an opportunity to explore knowledge and discuss potential ideas openly. These negative reactions by women hindered their engagement in other sessions, and they felt they could not explore ideas freely in class, because their interactions sometimes elicited negative reactions. They describe feeling afraid of making a mistake; being worried they might *inadvertently* upset their classmates, and have the women in the class 'come at them' with angry responses.

One participant explained he was conscious in class discussions his speech could be considered aggressive, because he was a man. His description is a more significant form of the above concerns of negative responses. He said he tried to modify his behaviour because of these responses:

'As a male, when I'm speaking to females and other people on the course, I really needed to be careful about how I spoke to people... ..Because I didn't want to come over as overly aggressive in terms of how I spoke, and my body language and things like that. That has really taught me how to be, maybe a little bit more reserved in terms of getting my point across, if that makes sense?' (James)

James was a 30-year-old White British man in the middle of his third year. A softly-spoken man, during his interview he said he felt anxious about his physical size and being a social work student, saying he was 'quite tall and big'. Whilst his consideration for his physical impact was not shared by the bulk of participants, it is useful when considered in relation to other participants' descriptions of feeling scared of making a mistake and speaking too directly during class discussions.

All the participants described class situations where they felt outnumbered by women, and most suggested these were important to their experience. Several men suggested that being in such a small minority on their course, and feeling unable to discuss these challenging topics openly, was for them a significant challenge. These participants felt their engagement was constrained and hindered because of the reprisals they had experienced when attempting to discuss challenging topics. Fear of negative reactions meant several participants felt they needed to be careful during class discussion and that they were not able to make mistakes. They believed these reactions were linked to them being men engaging in a women-majority environment, which they felt, at times, was uncomfortable and sometimes resulted in uncomfortable reactions. Importantly for this study, the participants that described these concerns explained they felt they needed to change their behaviour in order to avoid these issues in the future; and they managed these situations by being less forward and open during class discussions.

Self-protection

Most participants described protecting themselves whilst on their social work course, *from the expected elements of their course* (such as placement activities with children). They frequently described being worried, and used language suggesting they felt they needed to be on guard, such as the below example from Stuart's interview:

Jason: *What do you think that does about your relationship, then, with service users?*

'I think it's a difficult thing. I think too much is made of this sort of thing... So we're being hyper-vigilant about stuff... because the line is so thin [and] you want to stay so far away from it. You're almost too detached from it, and I think that will take away from the work that you can do.'
(Stuart)

They described protecting themselves in a variety of ways that are related, but important to consider in turn. First, every participant discussed needing to protect himself by managing the potential for allegations, particularly when working with children. Second, several participants appeared to feel they needed to be more cautious when undertaking direct work with service users. Third, a few participants described poor confidence, and protecting themselves by hiding difficulties so they did not appear 'weak'. Lastly, most participants described they did not readily seek help and believed they used less support services than women.

Every participant described being worried about allegations, specifically allegations of sexual misconduct. These were mostly discussed in relation to working with children. Importantly for this study, most participants stated these issues were because they were men, and believed women would not have similar concerns. When we discussed his recent placement, James said: 'I was always warned, if ever I was alone in a room with a child, to make sure the door was open and things like that. To protect yourself.' Another example is taken from Stuart's interview, but similar anxieties were discussed frequently by a number of other participants. At our interview, Stuart had left a career in the building and design industry because of a desire to work with children that had been abused by their parents. He explained when he was with a service user, he was conscious about the possibility of allegations being made against him, and actively worked to prevent them occurring. When I asked him for an example, he quickly thought of one, stating:

'In my second year, I was a keyworker for a young female, they was 15 [years old]. I was quite aware myself - when you're having key work meetings and where they are, and who's around and that sort of thing. I am probably more aware because I was male than I would have been if I was a female.' (Stuart)

Here he outlines several issues of interest for this study. First, he was working with an older child, and he refers to her as a 'female', not as a child, possibly

because of her age. Second, he describes deliberately selecting the venue for its openness, suggesting he would need to arrange meetings with care to help avoid allegations. Third, he suggests this issue arose because he was a man, and he thought he would be less likely to think about this or to be so cautious if he was a woman. When I asked him about this latter point, the difference for men and women social work students, he said:

'I think it was the risk of someone saying that I'd done something that I hadn't that I was probably most concerned about.' (Stuart)

He was more worried about allegations being raised by service users than anything else on placement, including chances of physical danger. As he had two young children of his own, I expected him to describe feeling comfortable around children, and he described feeling confident about assessing parenting; but he also felt when working directly with children that he needed to protect himself from potential allegations.

Being Cautious

These concerns about allegations and working with children coincided with several participants suggesting they, and other men social work students, needed to be more cautious than they thought a woman would need to be. When asked for an example, Stuart described a situation where he and a social worker from his team, a woman, conducted a home visit to a family with young children. He explained the situation as an explanation that she (as a woman) could be more physical with the children than he could be. During the visit, the social worker engaged with the children on their level, on the floor, including physical contact. He said:

'We went out to a family, two young children, probably three and five (years old)... The social worker I was with was sitting on the floor and the children were climbing on her and it was very tactile, really. I don't think I'd have been comfortable in that role because I was male.' (Stuart)

During this example, he suggested the social worker's actions were appropriate for her, because she was a woman. When he used the words, 'very tactile', he held his arms out from his body, waving his hands a little, almost a parody of a new father. These actions appeared to emphasise his understanding that similar actions for him, a man, would have been inappropriate.

Several other participants also suggested they felt they needed to be more cautious than a woman in their position because of the possibility for allegations, and a need to protect themselves. When discussing working with children, Saban described a story from his placement, connecting this story to his own concern. Early in this placement experience, he was told another man had been dismissed from his job, and suggested it was because there was close physical contact between the man and a young child:

'I went to a nursery, and I was observing a young boy. Before I got there, I was told that a male teacher had been sacked because someone walked in and he had a child on his lap... see what I mean?' (Saban)

Jason: *So they told you that before you went on the observation?*

'Yes, it wasn't necessarily the school was telling me, it was like I had a teacher say, "Ok... ..."

Jason: *Okay, and so what did you think when you heard that?*

'Well, I learned straight away I have to be really cautious with how I present myself physically to the children.' (Saban)

He described this experience as a cautionary tale, feeling he had been told about it to suggest he needed to be careful with how he engaged with children, to protect himself. The need to be more cautious was repeated by other men, with Owen suggesting:

'Say a woman [social work student] might be working with a kid, or a kid might be upset. A woman might hug the kid... ...I don't think I'd do that.' (Owen)

Participants that suggested the need for caution often suggested they needed to be careful because men were perceived as dangerous to children. They appeared to carefully consider these perceptions when on placement, and felt

they needed to be more cautious than a woman would. Will used a story of a child needing assistance as a description of how society's perspectives were important for his own actions, and that men were more of a risk to children:

'I think a really good analogy if a child fell over in the street I think passers by would be more suspicious of a man picking up a child and checking if they are okay compared to a woman. And for me it feels that it is so entrenched in society that number one the majority of sex offenders are men, and number two that females are natural carers.' (Will)

Jason: What does that mean for you in practice?

'Yes, so you have to be mindful.' (Will)

He considered this perception during his placement, and felt he thought about it during his practice with children. He thought it made him more reluctant to engage with children, and he needed to think carefully about his interactions on his placement. These experiences were described as explanations for why they needed caution to protect themselves from their actions being misinterpreted, and to restrict their physical contact with children.

Not Communicating a Lack of Confidence

This caution was implicated for some men with a lack of confidence. A few participants described a lack confidence, and felt it affected their progression. These situations were mostly in relation to placements, often about working with children. Appearing to have low confidence is often considered incompatible with hegemonic ideals of masculinity (Connell 2005). When participants described low confidence, they often expressed embarrassment. These participants generally described feeling uncomfortable discussing these problems with their tutor or PE. Lacking confidence when working with children was raised as being particularly problematic. Previous sections have shown that many men felt they needed to be more cautious when working with children. This caution could be interpreted by a placement as a lack of confidence, meaning the student was not able to complete the tasks required for a successful placement. Tom's interview provided a useful example of this issue. He was 24-years-old and had nearly

completed his third year, after he re-took a failed placement. During our interview, he presented as a softly-spoken gay man, and described feeling very shaken by his placement experience in a statutory children's social care team. When asked about why he thought he failed the placement, he said:

'I just didn't feel that I was adequate enough to do that work [parenting assessments] and I did experience a lack of confidence and a lack of self-esteem.' (Tom)

He described suffering 'an emotional crisis' because of this placement experience, and felt relieved to leave it even though failing caused serious progression problems. He felt his lack of confidence hindered his ability to work and engage with the social workers on his placement. He did not feel able to seek support and advice from his placement team. An example of this was when he said:

'I've found it difficult to communicate because of my lack of confidence... When I was doing work and I wasn't too sure about it, and I approached [team mates] and said, "I'm not sure about this?" and one social worker said, "Oh, you just need to get on with it, really". (Tom)

His narrative suggests this experience caused him to feel he needed to work more independently, even though he felt he did not have the knowledge to be able to do the tasks immediately. He thought another reason he struggled to develop confidence was that his PE told him repeatedly that he seemed nervous, and that his confidence was a problem:

'She was sort of saying, "You've got a lack of confidence and maybe you've got a lack of self-esteem."... But I feel as though because this was constantly mentioned on a weekly occurrence... *I think it just sort of pushed it further into the ground, really.*' (Tom)

What is important here is that Tom did not feel able to address the difficulties his lack of confidence was causing; he 'pushed it further into the ground'. He also felt he was unable to discuss it with colleagues on the team, because he felt they brushed him off, suggesting he needed to resolve the issue himself. He believed his inability to resolve this lack of confidence during the placement was the main reason he failed his placement, and this failure caused him significant distress.

Owen had a similar experience, and described how assimilating slowly on placement impacted on his progression. At the time of our interview, he had recently had his first placement abruptly suspended. He came to a large city for university from a rural area, and described being excited by this move. Throughout our interview he described how his PE and placement team thought he had low confidence because he learned new tasks more slowly than other people. When I asked why he thought his placement had been suspended, he explained that he thought he would be able to learn on the job, but his placement expected he would come prepared with more business-environment knowledge:

‘I was told that I would have to “hit the ground running”. But I didn’t, really. I kind of knew what that meant. I thought, “I have to kind of just take everything in and try”. But when I went there and got to it, a lot of the stuff I was expecting to do was stuff that I didn’t really have much idea about.’ (Owen)

His placement was in a young carer’s support organisation, providing a variety of respite services. He thought his inability to learn tasks quickly was the main reason for the abrupt suspension of the placement:

‘They brought that up [during the disruption meeting]... They didn’t really have the resources to get me trained up in [communication], and also the office area of things, me not knowing minutes wasn’t the only thing - there were quite a few little things. They said I was too slowly getting into it, they wanted someone who was already aware of them sort of things.’ (Owen)

During our interview, he expressed concern about the progression impact of this placement disruption. He said his tutor warned him it would be ‘months’ before he would get another placement, suggesting he deferred for a year, and he said this meant he would be ‘quite far behind’. He explained that did not want to defer, suggesting his first placement should have continued to enable him to gain this experience:

‘Which I did really take into consideration, deferring the course and getting some more life experience... The practice educator was saying a lot about “proving myself”, proving I’m ready for practice... How am I supposed to be ready for practice when I’ve not even done a placement yet?’ (Owen)

Owen presented this placement breakdown as the most significant feature of his course experience so far. His descriptions suggest he was relatively passive during the discussions with his tutor and PE about the placement. This lack of confidence about undertaking placement tasks, and a difficulty in addressing it, were central to these students' progression issues. They felt unable to respond, and unable to discuss them easily with their tutors and PEs. These participants experienced a lack of confidence as a particular challenge, because they felt unable to approach the support systems for assistance. Their narratives suggest they tried to resolve their issues on their own, without seeking help.

Complicating this picture of the impact of low confidence, a few participants described feeling a greater sense of autonomy, and using this successfully to manoeuvre their social work course. Those participants that suggested greater autonomy were often able to draw on a greater 'hinterland' of work experience. Most of them had years of employment experience in other fields before entering social work study. They frequently described using transferrable skills to enable them to engage confidently on placement, and felt their employment experience helped them adapt more easily to a range of environments. The most striking example was Mike, a 41-year-old White British man, at the interview he was at the end of his second year. He had performed well enough in his first placement to be encouraged by the team manager, clearly having successfully completed the required placement expectations. He was thrilled with the opportunity, and with his progress on his degree programme. He had no progression issues, and believed he would achieve a good result for his degree classification. He came to study social work after working in his previous field long enough to gain a position of some authority. He believed this previous experience prepared him well for the challenges of studying social work; he described using a number of skills learnt previously as a source of confidence to act appropriately as a student social worker on placement, and in class:

Jason: How have you done on the course?

'I've done better than I was expecting to. I think it's from the skills that I've crossed over from [my previous career].' (Mike)

Jason: *What sort of skills would those be?*

'Those skills would be difficult situations, talking with people, an example of that is turn up at a house, husband has found out wife has been cheating on him... so it's about trying to defuse the situation and there have been cases when I've been spat at... And also time management, presentation skills, professionalism.' (Mike)

For Mike, using a previous career was useful not only on placement, but also for the acquisition of effective classroom skills, such as presentation skills and time management. Another example was David, a 47-year-old White British man nearly at the end of his third year. He had achieved some success working in the entertainment industry. When I asked if he drew on his previous career experiences during the social work course, he said:

'I use my time management skills all the time – I wouldn't be able to manage all the competing demands without working at that level for years. It also helped me learn to focus and knuckle-down when I need to work... and, well, how to relate to people in a professional environment.' (David)

Both Mike and David described using skills developed during years in employment (in other fields) to effectively address the challenges of the social work course. Because of this experience, they felt able to engage in the course with confidence. After David explained he had received a First for his average marks in year two, and was hoping to do well overall, when I asked him if any of the assessments had given him any trouble, he responded, saying, 'No... .. I felt comfortable with them, I wouldn't say any of them have driven me to tears.' Participants with these descriptions were often on track to complete well, and felt very positive about their progression. They believed being able to apply previous work experience to their social work course tasks was central to their progression success.

(Not) Seeking Help

The participant narratives suggested that most thought men do not seek

feedback as readily as women, often suggesting this was because men wanted to protect themselves from appearing 'weak'. Some participants described concerns that seeking tutorial support might encourage tutors and other students to think they needed help, suggesting this should be avoided. They described that being seen by others to ask for support could negatively impact a man's self-respect. One example of this is taken from Simon's interview; at the time of the interview he was a 36-year-old Black African married man with several children. When I asked him about the range of marks in his class, he carried on to suggest he thought women received higher marks because they more often used support services:

'The women in the class, they get higher scores than the men.' (Simon)

Jason: *Why do you think that might be?*

'Probably using the support. I know people with disabilities work differently. We are too proud to use support.' (Simon)

Jason: *Do you use learning development unit or writing support or study skills?*

'No, I know I definitely don't... I know of a guy in class who people believe he needs the help but he doesn't believe he needs it, it's due to his own pride. But the women are very quick to get the support.' (Simon)

Jason: *What can we do to fix that?*

'I don't know how society can fix that.' (Simon)

Jason: *Society might not but social work courses might be able to?*

'I think the feedback, if you get it back and its really honest, I can look at it and swallow my pride and the whole school need not know.' (Simon)

Jason: *What do you mean?*

'Private feedback. We have all got our personal tutors and they are there to support our needs but *I haven't used mine since I was assigned to her*, I just didn't need her... We need to be able to come to the level that we need help and accept it. I tell people a lot that if you need help ask for it, but I am very bad at it! I don't give people my work to proofread. *I think I know it all, but there are a lot of mistakes...* ...So it has to do with pride, but women readily go for support.' (Simon)

Another example is provided by John who, when I asked him if he had any trouble with course work, said:

'I haven't been approaching lecturers a lot with my assignments and stuff and saying, "Look, well, this is what I got and this is how I'm feeling". I was trying to get my head around it by myself. It's like somehow, I haven't been able to do it doing that.' (John)

These two examples show how some participants did not seek help, even when they thought they could benefit from it. These men described trying to address their problems alone, without any assistance from tutors. In the first example, the student even suggests he does not follow his own advice to classmates to seek help if they need it. He thinks he and other men are too 'proud' to use tutors for 'help'. Importantly, women are suggested as seeking help more willingly and quickly. He later confirmed that he had not sought tutor support; despite believing he had issues with his writing skills. Also working alone, John described he had been struggling to understand the feedback he had been given on assignments. He advised that he was attempting to address the problems alone, without seeking help from his tutor. John later stated that: 'But my grades have not been what I wanted them to be.' These accounts were supported by several other participants who suggested they (and other men) were reticent to seek help, even if they needed it; this reticence was often connected to concerns that help-seeking would make them look less able to either tutors or other students.

The linking of help-seeking and weakness was raised in a number of ways. In particular, some participants described that if helping sessions were voluntary, they felt requesting a session suggested they were 'weak', and so avoided asking for support. Several participants felt seeking help suggested to others they may have academic problems, and they did not want anyone to think this. In the below excerpt, I asked Tom to describe a way that men's progression might be improved, he said:

'I think maybe it's, perhaps, the university could have a bit more awareness about the whole, you know, being macho but, but not butch but macho. Being masculine and not wanting to always, men not always wanting to talk about their problems, and maybe if they have tutorials with them, with their male students, so maybe just saying, "And how are you finding the course as a man?"' (Tom)

Jason: *Yeah.*

'Asking a question like that, rather than saying, "How are you finding the course?". Because if you say, "How are you finding the course?" and just leaving it like that, then, I don't know, I know that if somebody, like you, when I'd started the course and somebody did ask me, "How are you finding the course?", and I said, "Oh, brilliant". Whereas if they'd said, "How are you finding it as a man?", it would, maybe it would have turned round the response.' (Tom)

Jason: *Yeah. And you would have, you possibly thought about some of those things that you were identifying.*

'...err... Yeah, I mean, I think because the tutorials that we had at our university they weren't random. They were, we had one mandatory one but that was a group tutorial.' (Tom)

Jason: *OK.*

'And then, you know, the lecturers or tutors would say, "OK, if you want to book some time, just write it here with me" but I mean, maybe say, you know, perhaps, set up mandatory tutorials because... ..When I met people doing other courses at [my] university and they had, they did have mandatory courses.' (Tom)

Jason: *Tutorials?*

'And things, mandatory tutorials about two or three times in the semester.' (Tom)

In this excerpt, Tom describes a similar concern expressed by John and Simon above, although he uses the term 'macho' instead of 'pride'. These participants felt they and other men would be unlikely to seek help voluntarily, and Tom's suggested solution is to require men students to attend tutorials. He thought removing the voluntary choice of seeking help from men would result in better engagement with support. The analysis showed that participants connect seeking help to the way they engage as men, but also advises that the course may not address their needs because it was not sensitive to, or address their gender-specific issues. They felt that by not seeking help, they were protecting their reputation as competent men, their 'pride'. What is important for this study is participants connected these concerns directly to being *men*. They thought women sought help more readily, and this willingness had a positive impact on women's progression. They were aware their difficulties to seeking help likely had a negative impact on their progression, but were concerned about how

seeking help could make them appear as if they were unable to succeed alone. They felt they needed to protect themselves, and one way to do that was not to seek help, even if they would benefit from it.

Disengagement

Participants generally experienced disengagement from their course, support systems and classmates. Most participants believed men appeared more separated than women from the course and classmates, but also suggested there were fewer options for friends from their cohorts (because there were few men). It seems reasonable to suggest that the act of disengagement is likely to impact on progression.

A few participants thought that when men experienced difficulty, they disengaged further from the course, and (as seen above) did not seek help. Paul suggested that men disengage more than women, when I asked him what men do when having academic trouble:

Jason: What do you think men do when they start to struggle?

'I think they sort of disengage, to be honest. I think they're not as open to talk about their feelings, and what they're struggling with, and they're not as likely to seek support [as women]. And from what I've seen they definitely sort of disengage.' (Paul)

Whilst Paul did not identify any progression problems, his opinion about what other men might do if they were having academic issues is useful to this study. He described thinking that women and men reacted differently, and he thought because men are not as likely to seek support in general, when they have difficulty, that they are more likely to detach themselves from their course. Tom described a personal experience of disengagement, relating to a diagnosis of a learning difficulty:

'Well, that was a more personal thing.... it took a while for me to really comprehend that I was dyslexic.' (Tom)

Jason: *OK. So were you just given the diagnosis when you started here?*

'Yes.' (Tom)

Jason: *Oh, so nobody'd ever told you before?*

'No. I had support when I was younger... ...' (Tom)

Jason: *Yes?*

'Through my spelling and my grammar, and the opportunity came [at university] to have an assessment and I thought, I felt that it would be interesting to know, rather than having this question over my head. And I did it in the first year, and I honestly thought that when I got the report, it would say, "No, it's fine, maybe you just need to read up a bit". But when I started reading the report, and this is how they saw me... ... It was a bit of a shock. So I felt, like, disengaged...'

Jason: *OK.*

'I don't know... ... It's more of a personal thing. Because I've worked with people with learning disabilities... ...' (Tom)

Jason: *Yes. It's quite upsetting to get something like that, isn't it? Because it sort of alters your sense of who you are?*

'It altered me slightly, yes. And so I did get a bit of support but I just withdrew... ...' (Tom)

In the above extract, when Tom states he *withdrew*, he used this term to mean he did not positively engage in the course, not that he suspended studies. The above examples illustrate how some participants think men disengage when they are having difficulty. Ben described this as a response he had witnessed from other students, suggesting it to be a particularly masculine reaction to trouble or challenge. It is not surprising that Tom found a diagnosis of dyslexia disconcerting, as he would have been in his early twenties when diagnosed. What is useful for this study is his response, to disengage. Tom did have some progression problems, failing a placement, and described feeling a great deal of anger and fear as a result.

Separated from Classmates

Men provided accounts of less peer connections than women had, spending more time with other men (of which there are fewer on each course). Some participants advised that the very low numbers of men on social work courses meant they had fewer people for peer connections. They frequently described that having few men meant they felt separate from their classmates. Joey suggested being a man meant he often felt disconnected from his peers:

'When it came to discussions about children and people's own family lives, whether they were a single parent with one child or three children or they come from a family with a mum and dad and so there is a lot of commonality there with my peers as they all have children or are in the same sort of relations... ...'cause as a man you feel you are on the outside looking in.' (Joey)

Jason: *Is that how you feel?*

'I think that's one of the things about being surrounded by a lot of women you kind of get caught up in the conversation and don't have anything to contribute... There have been a couple of occasions when I thought I don't quite understand what you are saying.' (Joey)

This excerpt demonstrates how some participants felt being outnumbered made them feel separated, and less able to engage than the women. These participants described less connection with classmates than women students; some thought this reduced connection might have impacted on their progression. Depictions like this suggest some participants felt social conversations with classmates moved into areas where they felt unable to participate, causing them to feel separate as a result. Owen provides an example, commenting:

'You'd feel different and... ...Not many of your colleagues could relate to... ...your kind of obstacles you're facing, going through the same things.' (Owen)

He felt disconnected from his classmates, and believed this made his experience more difficult. Importantly for this study, when he was having trouble on his placement (before he failed this placement), he said he felt he could not talk about it with his peers, because none of them understood the issues, but also because he had not been connected with them before the problems started. It

was this experience that he was unable to discuss with his classmates. He felt because there were so few men, he thought they would not understand his issues ('not many of your colleagues could relate to your kind of obstacles'). Several participants, like Owen and Joey, felt separated from their classmates, suggesting this was exacerbated because there were so many women on their course.

A surprising finding was that most participants preferred men-only study groups. These gendered study groups would also likely have reduced participants' engagement with their classmates, who were mostly women. They described these men-only groups as 'less social' and 'more focussed' than the women-only or mixed gender groups. Stuart explained how he and the other three men in his year group would often study together, and that when he studied with the women, their study sessions were more social:

'And I'd say even though we would, sometimes, meet up and study, it would tend to be all four of the males.' (Stuart)

Jason: *So - that was just men?*

'No, there's a couple of females that came in, that were in the group that would study with us, as well. But, now I think about it, yeah, I mean there were a number of occasions I'm doing recent assignments, there was where there was me and two of the other male students in the room doing the actual, doing that work.' (Stuart)

Jason: *Do you think there are any differences between the groups?*

'I've been in the study groups with the females and the males, and a mixture of the both. For example, the one that would go to the other campus and set-up home for the day, with kettles and cakes and more of a social gathering than anything else and but you could come from there and not have achieved very much, at all. I think, when you've got the three of us in a room - all the lads in a room, it was more, it was either no work or all work. If you know what I mean?' (Stuart)

Jason: *Yeah. Yeah.*

'It was either, you know, you'd be sitting there on Facebook and just generally chatting or it would well, if we're doing it, let's just nail it and carry on. Not as much of the small talk, I suppose.' (Stuart)

What is illuminating from this excerpt is Stuart's description of how he thought men and women studied differently, and how, to his own surprise, he realised he frequently studied with only other men. He seemed unaware that he did this until he thought about it. Engaging in a study group that does not contain as much social engagement as others in the class means that some participants had less peer social connections than the women. The descriptions here suggest the women in the course were connecting not only via their focussed study, but also about their personal lives. These participants described that when with other men they avoided as much discussion about social topics. David echoed the connection with other men, suggesting that it was 'natural' for men to want to study together without women:

'I think obviously that the four guys on the course are going to have their little thing going on.' (David)

These experiences served to underline the separation from the majority of their classmates, the women. Most participants sought out study opportunities with the other men, even though these situations reduced their engagement with the rest of their classmates. Their connections were less social than they observed the women's interactions.

Fewer Options of Connecting with Other Men

Because there were so few men, many participants described feeling they had fewer options for classmates to select as potential friends, identifying gender as one of the main reasons for selection. Saban explained studying with other men highlighted for him there were less options for him to connect, and that he thought men and women engaged differently:

'But because there's only three guys, we say, "Look guys, shall we just get together?"' (Saban)

Jason: Yes.

'So having less guys... ...[means] less opportunity to do that sort of thing. And I do think there is a different dialect between men and women.' (Saban)

Most participants described the lack of men on their course as something they were acutely aware of; a number of them felt isolated, and that the isolation had a negative impact on their experience. One participant, Will, who was at the end of his third year, remembered this about his first day as a social work student:

‘Even the first day of walking into university - I think we started off with 46 people and six were men. It’s a really small number!’ (Will).

He described how this was one of his first memories of the course, starting with so few other men (although having six men out of 46 students (13%) is very near the national average of 15%). He described in his cohort, there was only one suitable option for a friend, based the other man’s gender and age:

‘Thinking back, on the first day I did immediately go to the youngest looking male to identify someone who was similar to me. And I think me and him have been friends and worked together since then.’ (Will)

Similarly, Ben, a 21-year-old man interviewed during his third year, stated: ‘You just look out to a sea of women, which can be daunting on the course.’ The small number of men was frequently discussed, and by most participants, as a significant part of their course experience. Their narratives presented these descriptions as part of an experience of disconnection and isolation from their peers.

For some participants, this scarcity of other men not only contributed to feeling disengaged, but they felt it contributed to their progression issues. Anthony suspended studies in his first year; he thought the lack of other men affected his course engagement. He explained he suspended his first year because of poor grades, and when I asked what might have contributed to him deferring studies, he said:

‘If there were more males on the course, and I was friends with more males on the course... .. I don’t know... .. if that would be easier.’ (Anthony)

Jason: *Do you think that that affected your progression through the first year?*

'It certainly had a massive impact, it was the pressure and the feeling of frustration or conflict I was getting.' (Anthony)

Anthony's example is illuminating, because he describes having difficulty in his first year, and feeling unable to talk to his peers about these difficulties. He suggests uncertainly that having more men *might* have helped him. He is clear, though, that being unable to discuss the issues with any other men had an impact on his progression. When this is considered in combination with the other examples, such as Ben thinking the number of women being 'daunting'; it seems reasonable to suggest Anthony would have felt more able to connect with his peers if there were more men in his class, gaining the type of support that he thinks might have helped him persist with his course instead of suspending his studies.

Participant narratives suggest a strong sense of feeling separated from their classmates, and because there were so few men on their course, they had fewer options for social and study connections. The lack of social connection during their study sessions was a notable difference to how they believed women studied. This experience of detachment contributed to an overall sense of disengagement from the course, and some men described men as detaching more when under duress. These various forms of disengagement appeared to contribute to a sense of disconnection from their peers and the class, and could, for some men, be perceived as contributing to progression issues.

Increased Chance of Failing and Withdrawing

When these five elements are considered in combination, it may help explain partially why some men social work students have progression issues. Many participants described feeling unwanted in the profession. This sense of discomfort is heightened in specific circumstances, such as working with children

or discussing domestic abuse. Participants sometimes felt men did not innately have the ability to accomplish some social work tasks. Perspectives of traditional masculinity are involved in this discomfort, as most participants explained feeling society viewed them (and other men) as more dangerous than women. Some men did not feel comfortable openly discussing in class, and described being worried they might inadvertently upset their women classmates, and experiencing reprisals; leading to a feeling of being silenced. Most participants felt the need to protect themselves, although this was experienced in several ways. This desire caused them to be more hesitant, and they frequently did not seek help, feeling this would make them appear 'weak'. As a consequence, when they were faced with trouble, some men may elect to disengage even further from the course, with a likely impact on their progression. A majority of participants felt separated from their classmates, and some men believed this impacted on their progression.

Whilst not all participants described all of the elements outlined above in a simple linear process, analysis revealed each of the accounts included some of the issues. Even if they did not personally experience an issue, participants often suggested understanding other men in their class had similar experiences. These elements were presented (when experienced) as prominent in participants' course experience, even if they did not have any progression problems; such as the lack of other men and feeling uncomfortable when discussing men's violence. Considering how these elements of the course experience relate to progression for these men is a central issue for this study. For some men, the elements identified above appeared to combine with external non-gendered factors, to contribute to their challenges on the course. For example, Tom explained that because he was not a father, he was uncomfortable when working with children, or to assess parents' parenting skills:

'I've never looked after a child, so, when I was asking parents questions about parenting and, you know, and parenting capacity, I found it quite alien to me because I didn't feel that I had anything to back it up with.'
(Tom)

Tom also described feeling a lack of confidence, and concern about seeking help whilst he was failing his placement. What is of note for this study is Tom's failed placement, and how he thought his inexperience and anxiety about working with children was part of the reason he failed. He described thinking this lack of parenting experience had resulted in significant consequences since he had failed his children's placement. He directly linked his lack of children's experience to his struggling on the placement. Joey suggested a comparable experience, with an excerpt used previously recounting similar concerns about assessing parenting; he suspended studies for a year, and then after returning, withdrew completely from the course. Owen is another good example with excerpts used previously: he described concerns about discussing topics like domestic violence, he was worried about how he would engage on placement, felt out of his depth, did not seek help, and failed his placement. A number of other participants described progression problems, many identifying having 'writing issues', but not seeking help. The findings show a complicated interplay of factors that contribute to progression problems, instead of a simple explanation of specific issues that are present for all social work student men. The interplay of these factors, identified via analysis across participant accounts, appeared to be a more significant issue than any single, consistent experience. The figure below (Figure 3) shows how these issues can interlock with other general issues, as well as showing several mitigating factors found during this analysis.



Figure 3 Social Work Student Men's Experience and Progression

What this figure depicts is how there may be both 'push' and 'pull' factors for men social work students about their experience and background that might be connected to their progression. These factors can be layered with more general challenges that all students might experience, such as time management. The mitigating factors found by the analysis of participant narratives suggest there are some situations that helped the men feel more comfortable in social work (both course and profession) and it is likely these may aid their progression. Importantly, this study found multiple challenges described by participants, with each participant describing at least some of these during their account, even if they did not have progression issues. A number of men described several of these challenges during their interview, and these appeared to be aligned with greater progression problems.

Summary

The men in this study felt their course experience differed starkly from the women on their courses. They frequently felt they did not belong, as if they were unwelcome in the social work profession, because of beliefs that men are not innately suited to 'caring roles'. Women were described as more intuitively aligned with the social work role, and participants, therefore, frequently felt they did not have the right to undertake central social work tasks, such as assessing parenting. These feelings were exacerbated by class experiences where several participants felt silenced. These men felt unable to explore the new ideas being learnt in the social work class sessions, out of concern for saying something that would result in reprisals from their classmates. Participants also described a range of self-protection mechanisms, with each participant being worried about allegations, and several describing they felt they needed to be cautious in their practice. Several men suggested they were worried they would appear 'weak' if they needed help. Across the accounts, participants expressed they felt less connected to their classmates than women, with different study patterns that were less social, further increasing their separation and isolation from their peers. When these elements are considered with the non gender-specific issues identified, such as general financial concerns or the difficult amount and range of course work, what is consistent is that these men all experienced some of these issues, but not all resulted in progression issues. Some men described some complicating experiences, such as drawing on previous employment history, or relationships with women in their family, which they felt enabled them to manage being a social work student. In the next chapter, relevant theories are applied to help understand the implication of the themes found in this study and presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter summarises findings from the qualitative analysis, and uses theories and a range of knowledges to help understand participants' experiences. By using both existing knowledge, and the original findings from the present study, this chapter seeks to answer the remaining unanswered research questions. The main research question is:

Why are there greater progression problems for men than for women in social work courses in England?

In order to answer this question, the following question, not already answerable from available knowledge, was used to help provide a comprehensive understanding of men's progression problems:

What are men's experiences of studying social work, and can these experiences help us understand their progression problems?

The interviews undertaken in this study sought to use men social work student experiences to answer these questions. The participant accounts suggest men in social work education in England have a different experience than they believe women do, and have more significant challenges. Analysis of their accounts suggests a series of layered themes, including some issues not specifically associated with men. All of the participants experienced at least one of these themes found during analysis, but for some men, these issues may combine to encourage progression difficulties (such as failure or withdrawal). These issues, when considered in combination, suggested that some men experience a process of increasing academic difficulty and disengagement, indicating implications for progression.

The participant accounts showed the setting of social work did not feel

welcoming to participants, as men. It also provided frequent examples when they were uncomfortable, often thinking men did not have the innate skills used to be social workers. This discomfort was increased by topics considered central to social work, such as working with children or domestic abuse. During discussions, participants often felt silenced, as if they, because they were men, did not have a right to hold a view or to express an opinion. This meant that they did not feel free to openly discuss new topics, an important element of university education. Participants described feeling worried about reprisals from other students and women social workers if they misspoke, and several were uncertain about how to manage their involvement. Their inhibition carried over into other areas, where participants described several ways of self-protection. They described not seeking help when they thought they needed it, and some hid struggles from their peers and tutors, out of fear of appearing 'weak'. Participants thought men social work students needed to be much more cautious than women, because they thought men were more likely to receive allegations from service users. They frequently described feeling isolated from their peers, and feeling they had fewer options for friends, because of the lack of other men, increasing their isolation. Their gendered-study choices further reduced their engagement with their classmates, because they studied in less socially connected study groups than women. These elements combined, for some men, to increase their disengagement, which was implicated in some students' progression difficulties. Because a small sample of social work student men were interviewed to generate qualitative data, it is important to acknowledge the resulting limitations. These findings are not, therefore, generalisable to a wider population. Their views, though, can be used to provide a more comprehensive understanding about men's experiences and progression issues on social work courses.

This chapter applies theories and current knowledge to understand the findings derived from analysing the participant interviews. When considering theories that could be used, no single theory appeared to have enough explanatory power.

First, whilst the *Student Integration Model* (SIM) (Tinto 1975, 1987) was an intuitive option, it lacked a consideration of the specifically gendered nature of participants' descriptions. As a result, theories of gender were applied, particularly 'Doing Gender' (West and Zimmerman 1987, 2009) and hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan *et al.* 1985; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). These theories helped illuminate some specific issues experienced by the participants because of their gender as men, including their perceptions of masculine ideals or traditional male roles, and the impact of these ideals for them as social work students. During the data analysis, however, it became apparent these men were describing experiences that could be explained as situationally-specific stigma. This realisation suggested Goffman's (1963) understanding of stigma could be used to consider their responses to their experiences. The applications of these theories and existing knowledge are outlined in the below sections. In particular, this study develops the application of stigma for specific groups of men by Coston and Kimmel (2012). They showed that men, in particular, can face complicated experiences of stigma and privilege, which can make the examination of stigma for them more difficult to unpack. During analysis of the interviews, however, it became clear that the men were describing experiences with intersecting challenges from joining social work. Their experiences are presented in two complementary sections: considering social work education as a site of challenge for men; and the ways men students appear to attempt to manage their progression through a social work course.

Social Work Education as a Site of Challenge for Men

Context is significant when considering stigma; an individual can be stigmatised in one setting but privileged in another (Coston and Kimmel 2012; Crocker *et al.* 1998; Toyoki and Brown 2014). The specific context for social work students is central to these men's experiences. Participants did not generally describe feeling 'out of place' outside of social work situations, in fact, several described

feeling they 'fitted' in previous employment settings. They were, however, frequently uncomfortable in social work situations. Similarly, Crabtree and Parker (2014, p.9) suggest they found men social work students 'vibrating between positions of marginalisation and privilege'. In the present study, participants spoke frequently about feeling the social work profession did not welcome them. They described feeling men were not 'natural' social workers, because men were not 'naturally caring' or typically supposed to work with children.

In addition to these concerns of innate connection to social work, some participants felt isolated, influenced by the low numbers of other men on the course, and the less social study methods. Isolation affects progression for minority students in higher education (Connor *et al.* 2004), and in this setting, men are considered a minority (Moriarty *et al.* 2009). *Differentiation* and *separation* between the two groups are described as defining features of stigma by Link and Phelan (2001); with the stigmatised in one group, and 'normals' in another. Participants recounted a range of experiences across the interviews suggesting they felt separated from and different than the women on their courses. They perceived the women as the 'normals', the standard to which they were judged, and that the course was designed with women students in mind. Ian even used the same phrase employed by Link and Phelan (2001, p.370), 'us and them', when describing how he felt as a man amongst women on a social work course, particularly whilst on placement.

Context and separation are not enough, to experience stigma also requires a trait to be connected to negativity (Goffman 1963; Link and Phelan 2001). In social work situations, participants described being concerned that other people thought they were a possible threat to children or women. Social work tasks expect that these men will undertake home visits and interview service users in their own homes (Ferguson 2011), and the bulk of social service interactions are with women and frequently involve children (Christie 1998b; Scourfield 2001c). These

situations (and future possibilities) were reported as a primary source of concern for participants; they worried other individuals could think they were dangerous, but they were also anxious about receiving allegations of sexual assault. These worries, originating from the men placing themselves in these situations by choosing to study social work, come from men's perceived abuses of power, arising from their socially-ascribed privileged positions in society. Theories of gender suggest that men's privilege also causes some disadvantages for them (Connell 1995; Pease 2015). Because of men's 'power' over women and children elsewhere in society, in social work situations, most participants believed they were more threatening or worrisome than a woman would be. These experiences show a paradox of men's privilege for this setting, suggesting a possibility for using this site to improve gender relations by engaging with this paradox. As Kaufman (1999) argues 'the realization of men's contradictory experiences of power... allows us to better grasp what we might think of as the gender work of a society' (p. 60). The participant accounts help identify gender boundaries, outlining what are acceptable behaviours and situations for men and what are not. Other studies have found men social work students experience both privilege and marginalisation during their social work course (Crabtree and Parker 2014). It is important to remember that these men, if they qualify, often advance to positions of management and power more quickly than women social workers (Pease 2011; Williams 1992). Management is often connected with men social workers, which some scholars suggest is partially driven by a desire to move into spheres that are regarded as being more acceptable for men than direct practice (Christie 1998b). Participants were consistent, however, in describing feeling uncomfortable in social work situations, and these were heightened in specific areas, most notably working with children and discussing domestic abuse.

Moral Career

When analysing participant descriptions, it became apparent that participants were experiencing an important phase of what Goffman calls a 'moral career' (1963). A moral career is the process one undergoes when becoming aware of the possession of a stigmatising trait. This phase represents a particularly useful stage for research, as it is at this time that individuals are becoming aware they may possess a stigma. For participants, stigma was often unexpected (and generally unrealized), as being men ensures benefits from the patriarchal dividend (Connell 2005). Goffman suggests this phase is 'especially interesting' (1963, p.36), because during this period the stigmatised begin reacting to experiences of stigma. Participants frequently appeared unsure about the impact for them of being *men* in social work, but were more fluently able to describe their own challenges, as suggested by those men that identified the lack of other men to connect with as a challenge. It was useful to consider the moral career for participants because to experience stigma requires the stigmatised to feel less powerful than 'normals' (Link and Phelan 2001). Participants understandably felt less powerful than those that are assessing them (Lea and Street 1998), but also described the women students as having more freedom and less caution; as they saw women as more innately suited to being social workers and allowed more latitude as a result. Linking women to a more innate affinity with social work has been identified by other scholars (Christie 1998b; Scourfield 2001c), suggesting some believe men are less aligned to caring roles. The newness of this stigma, of feeling less suitable for social work tasks, was a productive element of the participant experience. Noticing this issue for the first time was not consistently mentioned by participants, but this was to be expected. Given men's relative power elsewhere, and recent entrance into social work, as students, it is reasonable to assume their awareness of any stigma might be inconsistent. It would appear furthermore that if they are just becoming aware of any potential stigma, then they are also experiencing new challenges as a result of this new revelation. Again, these descriptions appear to suggest participants were identifying the boundaries between men and women, and what actions and

behaviours are allowable for men. These boundaries would be highlighted because they were *transgressing* this boundary as a result of joining the social work course (Christie 1998b; Williams 1993).

Stigma and Identity

Stigma theory proposes that stigmatised individuals are negatively affected by their experience (Link and Phelan 2001). Their perception of self is affected, and their interactions with others become a site of uncertainty, anxiety and possible retribution. The stigmatised are affected because they feel *separated* from others, and different from 'normals', as well as feeling inadequate. Participants described feeling this separation, and not feeling as adequate as women to be social workers. They often suggested this inadequacy was because men were just less suited to social work tasks. Several participants described anxiety about class discussions, and concerns of reprisals from the women students or lecturers. They felt they needed to manage these situations carefully, and were worried they would do something that would result in angry responses from their classmates.

The psychic work participants described arises, according to Goffman, because 'the stigmatized individual defines himself as no different from any other human being, while at the same time he and those around him define him as someone set apart' (1963, pp.132–133). This double experience is central to the feeling of stigma and anxiety that the 'stigmatised' experience whilst interacting with others, as it requires more psychic work for the individual to manage what are often considered to be mundane interactions. This extra effort is because the stigmatised are "situation conscious" while 'normals' present are spontaneously involved *within* the situation, the situation itself constituting for these 'normals' a background of unattended matters' (Goffman 1963, pp.135–136 original emphasis). It is clear from the interviews that participants were certainly 'situation conscious', but they also frequently described that they thought the women

students did not need to consider their gender in relation to social work tasks. Every participant spoke of feeling *separate* from the rest of his cohort, but many felt they needed to be conscious of their actions in a way they thought women social work students did not. They felt they had to speak more carefully in class discussions, and that they needed to protect themselves from allegations. These distinctions again suggest these men are living at the borders of their gender, and sometimes transgressing that border; experiencing repercussions as a result of contravening the boundaries of appropriateness for men.

Spoiled Identities

From a synthesis of findings presented in Chapter Six, participants described a two-fold stigma; outlining two distinct, but related, spoiled identities. Their narratives suggest that becoming a social worker spoils their masculinity, but also that being a man spoils their growing social work identity. Both of these identity issues created discomfort and uncertainty for some participants. These will be explored in turn below.

First, the following outlines how social work spoils some men social work students' masculinity. Because social work is constructed as an emotional, 'caring' profession, and current Western notions of hegemonic masculinity include emotional control (Connell 2005), participants often described how they, as men, did 'not fit in' to social work settings. They often aligned social work with 'caring', and suggested that because of this association men might not be as naturally able to be social workers as women. Social work is clearly linked to femininity and caring (Christie 1998b; Parker and Crabtree 2014; Scourfield 2001c), and by being a man studying to join the social work profession the participants were making a choice that could, at best, result in surprise, but at worst, could produce reprisals. These experiences are found elsewhere in WMO, as outlined by Williams (Williams 1993; Williams 1995), but also identified by other scholars in more recent work (Hanlon 2012; Simpson 2009; Weaver-

Hightower 2011). Stigma theory suggests the experience requires the connection of a stereotype to an attribute and this results in the individual having a diminished social value (Goffman 1963; Link and Phelan 2001). Participants in this study provided a range of examples of hearing stereotypes suggesting men were less suitable than women for social work, but what was particularly important was that the participants often *agreed* with these perspectives. Several participants felt they, as men, were unable to assess parenting skills, and almost all said they felt social work was a caring profession and was, therefore, understandably problematic for men. A number of studies exist to suggest that men in WMO experience role strain (Christie 2006; Lupton 2006; Williams 1993). The perception social work is a caring profession, and therefore not considered a suitable profession for men appears to be a specific example of this role strain (Christie 2006; Crabtree and Parker 2014). This perceived contradiction between manliness and social work has been found in other research studies undertaken with social workers (Christie 1998b; Crabtree and Parker 2014; Cree 1996), but this is the first time that this has been directly related to progression issues. The delineation of gender-appropriate behaviours outlined earlier is prominent here, for it was when these men entered social work that some participants were told they were undertaking roles normally associated with women. As a result of having this transgression highlighted, previous studies have found that some men refuse to identify as social workers when in social situations, preferring to pretend to have another profession (Christie 2006). Christie (2006) suggested the men social workers often ‘recognized some degree of tension between their professional and gender identities... *often describing their work as “not the kind of work that most men do”.*’ (pg. 394, emphasis added). Whilst none of the participants in the present study said that they hid their social work identity from other people, they did suggest similarly that they thought social work was less ‘natural’ for men, and provided a range of reasons for this assertion. The strain of the possible incompatibility of these roles was described by a number of the participants in this study.

The second issue of spoiled identity results from participants' masculinity spoiling their developing social work identity. Throughout the interviews, participants frequently described that society believes men are more violent and dangerous, particularly in relation to children. This presumption of inherent violence and danger created concerns amongst participants that they would be considered inappropriate for social work, because they were associated, through being men, with this violence. Several participants described thinking service users may be more worried about working with them because they were men. In an excerpt from Anthony's interview used previously, he stated: 'I think the first thing to note, a male going into a house with a female she may feel intimidated straight away. There is an element, an unspoken thing, again the hostility.' This perception of violence appeared indelibly linked to their identity as men and, as a result, participants felt they needed to manage colleagues' and service users' concerns about their potential for violence. These participant descriptions suggest beliefs that men's aggression is lying just beneath the surface of *all* men, and this could possibly affect their work with service users. Several men suggested a woman in the same circumstance would be inherently better at the social work tasks, because of the lack of this potential violence. Violence is closely aligned with notions of hegemonic masculinity, suggesting a masculine response includes violence as a form of conflict resolution (Connell 2002; Hayslett-McCall and Bernard 2002). Similarly, participants described needing to carefully manage their communication style so that it is not mistaken for aggression. Managing emotions in challenging circumstances is a cornerstone of social work practice, as social work 'requires the capacity to handle both one's own and others' emotions effectively' (Morrison 2007, p.245). This perceived latent violence, as associated with masculinity, can be considered as spoiling the participants' maturing social work identity.

Participants were more strident about their anxieties about working with children, and many suggested men were believed to be more dangerous to children. They were particularly concerned about the potential for allegations, and for having

their actions misinterpreted, either by service users or colleagues. They described being worried about their behaviour, and concerned that colleagues on placement would suggest they were acting inappropriately towards children (mostly in relation to physical contact). Men's physical contact has been shown in studies from nursing, another WMO, to be more sexualized than women's (Evans 2002; Harding *et al.* 2008), so it is not unreasonable to assume a similar concern for men's physical contact in these settings. The possibility of allegations or misinterpretation, and considering ways to protect themselves from them, was frequently discussed as an area of concern for most of the men, even those without progression issues. These situations are another setting in which men's masculinity was spoiling their emerging social work identity.

These various concerns of violence, aggression and misinterpretation are all related to communication. Modern British social work includes developed communication skills with people who have a range of abilities. The HCPC standards of proficiency includes communication as one of the central competencies for social work (HCPC 2012). However, in the present study several participants described being concerned about how being men might cause difficulties for them to communicate and engage meaningfully and freely with service users. A large amount of social work is undertaken with women and children (Christie 1998b; Scourfield 2001c); if men social work students feel they are less able to communicate with them because they are men, this suggests that barriers may exist to enable their full participation in social work professional tasks. These barriers to their assimilation highlights that participants' felt their masculinity was, at times, spoiling their developing social work identity.

What these experiences expose is the importance of the perceived *controllability* of the situation. If an individual is believed to choose to be in a specific situation, reactions to any resulting stigma are more negative (Crocker *et al.* 1998). Because they have embarked on a course it could be argued that these

participants were choosing to enter social work. Participant accounts included reactions suggesting they were choosing to be in a traditionally women's occupation, a setting which many men felt was unwelcoming to them, and in which they frequently felt uncomfortable. Using Goffman's (1963, p.170) conceptualisations, the participants could be called *disaffiliates* because they are deliberately flouting the rules of society and going against the grain by joining a profession perceived as not suitable for men. Again, these experiences show participants are manoeuvring the gendered boundary of appropriate behaviour for men. Negative reactions can be found in the descriptions of prejudice, such as Tom's description of *territorial* women on placement, or Nick's description of *institutionalised* lecturers. The reactions described by participants may occur because they are challenging the worldview of 'normals' (Crocker *et al.* 1998), by placing themselves, as men, in a caring arena, normally considered the domain of women (Christie 1998b; Hanlon 2012; Simpson 2009; Williams 1993). For many of the men they felt out of place, in a setting where women should be. The equation participants appeared to realise was: ***if women = caring, and caring = social work, and women = social work, and men ≠ caring, then men ≠ social work***. Most of the participants described feeling some conflict of these identities during their interview. This feeling appeared to create a sense of cognitive dissonance for some men, of feeling as if they did not belong in social work, an experience described at various points by a majority of the participants in the present study.

Social Work Topics that Emphasise Men's Stigma

Most of the participants in this study identified several sites frequently that they felt increased the perception they did not belong in social work: interactions with children; situations involving domestic abuse; and discussions about gender and men's power. Situations that highlight stigma are more problematic for the stigmatised. These situations throw the stigmatising issue into sharp relief for the stigmatised and 'normals', requiring both to acknowledge the presence of the

stigma characteristic, refusing to allow it to be ignored. These situations often become sites of anxiety for the stigmatised, producing anxiety the situation may elicit negative reactions (Goffman 1963; Crocker *et al.* 1998). These topics also highlighted the gendered boundary for participants, as topics involving children are frequently associated with women and femininity (Cree 1996; Scourfield 2001c), and masculinity is often defined as a 'repudiation of the feminine' (Kimmel 1994, p.126).

Participants felt being a man made engaging with service users more dangerous for them, and that they needed to make careful choices to protect themselves, or would be at risk of allegations of misconduct. Several participants described feeling they needed to 'protect themselves' because of potential allegations. The concerns for allegations was discussed by almost every participant, and usually in relation to children, but occasionally about women service users. Their descriptions suggest these situations highlighted that they were in circumstances more often undertaken by women. Physical contact with children was frequently raised as a concern, and an issue participants felt made them particularly vulnerable. Several men described attempting to manage this vulnerability by refusing all physical contact with children, but some participants suggested that this restriction likely made it harder for them to help service users.

Several participants were also concerned about how they, as men, could assess parenting capacity, and considered this problematic for their developing social work skills. Assessing parenting capacity is one of the central tasks in children's social work (Ferguson 2011), and assessment is a central role for social workers (TCSW 2014). These experiences were another site that highlighted participants' gender, and made some participants feel more exposed. Some participants (particularly those without children) felt men were less able to assess parenting than women, and several felt completely unfit to undertake this task altogether; these placements had some significant progression issues (one participant failed

this placement, and another suspended studies followed by withdrawal). Difficulties about working with children were one of the most prominent and pressing concerns in many participant narratives. Social work with children is one of the most well-known roles of current British social workers, but some participants felt that they were not appropriate for the task *because they were men*. These practice situations with children combine two issues for men as social work students: because parenting is predominantly associated with mothering and women (Scourfield, 2006), some participants did not feel men had the innate skills to work with children; and participants' personal concern about potential allegations, because women and children might be perceived to be more at risk from physical and sexual violence from men (Pringle 1993). West and Zimmerman's (1987) conceptualisation of 'doing gender' is useful here, as it helps explain how participants' previous gender interactions did not prepare them for presenting themselves, and their gender, in these circumstances with children. These are additional barriers for these students that women are not likely to experience, but that participants discussed frequently and with anxiety. Participants' concerns about allegations are of note when considering research about cases of social worker's misconduct. More men than women (*numerically* more men, not simply a higher ratio of their gender) are dismissed from the social work profession by the regulator for inappropriate contact with service users (Furness 2015; Melville-Wiseman 2016). This is significant because there are significantly more women registered as social workers in England, with only 22% men (GSCC 2012).

Reduced to a Stereotype

In addition to the above concerns about working with children and their families, participants also frequently suggested domestic abuse and gender oppression were challenging topics for them to discuss. Domestic abuse was challenging for two reasons: several participants believed men would struggle to support women that suffered domestic abuse; and a majority felt 'singled out' during these discussions. They suggested they felt highlighted in these sessions because of

the prevalence of men's violence to women. Stuart described attending a domestic abuse session as part of his placement, where he was the only man, and where he felt that he was seen by the other attendees as representing *all* men. Participants described these situations as if they were reduced solely to their gender, being seen as a man, first, before everything else.

In stigma theory, these feelings arise because the stigmatising issue takes precedence over other forms of identity in these situations. The individual's stigma reduces them to a stereotype, subsuming their individual identity into a simulacrum of the stigma group. People who are perceived to have privilege (such as men) may not often experience being reduced to a stereotype. In this circumstance, where being a man is problematic; their gender is fore-grounded, with the individual being considered secondary to their group identity. Other scholars have also identified domestic abuse as a challenging area for men social work students (Lloyd and Degenhardt 1996; Parker and Crabtree 2014). These previous studies, however, suggested men students in these situations are likely to react negatively or to combat anti-male sentiment. Whilst there were some notable examples of this (see 'militancy', below), most of the participant descriptions expressed during the present study portray themselves as attempting to be sensitive to the topic of violence perpetrated by other men; but they also struggled to reconcile this with their self-identity. Several men described feeling they needed to apologise for other men's violence, and attempted to separate themselves from other men. These participants suggested they believed they were different, and could work with vulnerable people (typically identified by participants as women) with some concerted effort. Jeremy described himself to service users as a 'safe male', and hoped that he could work with them to discern the difference between dangerous and 'safe' men.

The desire to differentiate themselves from this violence was important for the participants. This issue is also found in practice, as 'pejorative discourses of

client masculinity are in fact dominant in child care teams' (Scourfield & Coffey, 2002, p. 323). Parker and Crabtree (2014, p.321) suggested men students sometimes respond to 'overt negative assumptions of men'. Given the centrality of human rights and gender equality to social work (IFSW 2014), and the role social workers undertake supporting victims of domestic abuse, it is reasonable to assume social work courses discuss domestic abuse as a significant area of work. This means these discussions are likely to be a feature of most men's social work educational experience, and most participants described these as difficult for them to navigate. They found being connected to all men disconcerting, and felt unprepared to address the level of responsibility required by being reduced to a stereotype of *all* men.

Men's Responses to Social Work Education

Participants described several techniques that, when considered through the lens of stigma and gender theories, appeared to potentially be used to manage the challenges of being men in social work education settings. It is important to remember that social work is considered 'women's work' (Christie 2001b; Parker and Crabtree 2014; Williams 1993) by some of the participants, many of their peers and, certainly, by wider society. Entering this world for women, through their social work course, resulted in all of the participants describing some discomfort. This discomfort was more significant for some men, and heightened in relation to specific topics. Some of their described responses align with stigma-management techniques, drawn from stigma theory, including: in- and out-group alignments; militancy; and disengagement. One way participants appeared to manage sticking out of the crowd was to connect with other men. Participants described seeking connections with other men, using 'in-group alignment', but also spoke of trying connect with 'normals' (women) through 'out-group alignment'. A few participants made statements displaying militancy, but there were many more examples of disengagement described by participants.

Militancy means these men would deliberately highlight their masculine identity (Coston and Kimmel 2012; Goffman 1963) in an attempt to gain some advantage, rather than downplay their gender. These mechanisms appeared to be used as a way to protect participants from the difficulties encountered by studying social work, but did not always help their progression, and will be considered in turn below.

As outlined in Chapter Six, most of the participants suggested their course experience included situations where they felt a need to protect themselves. These are presented in some detail in the previous chapter. Several participants described hiding struggles, out of concerns for appearing weak, or not seeking help if they needed it. Some attempted to 'push through it', and resolve issues without support, often alone. These responses each align with ideals of masculinity, which valorises men's autonomy, and argues men should perform without assistance (Brannon 1976; Kimmel 2004). Allegations, and the threat of them when interacting with service users, were a significant concern for many of the men. They responded to these concerns by making choices about who else was present during interactions with service users, and about being more cautious during interactions. The men believed allegations were a result of the society's beliefs about men's behaviour, and that service users felt more at risk from men than women. This identification with other men and masculine ideals ('in-group alignment'), caused difficulty for some participants, for example, several did not seek help when they needed it, and wanted to appear autonomous when unable to perform without assistance. Consider Simon's statement about him and the men on his course not accessing support because they were 'too proud'. These men experienced progression issues, including failing placements, and several described unresolved writing issues that impacted on their marks.

Participants also connected with other men through their different study patterns

than the women on their course. Many of them engaged in men-only study groups, and believed study groups including women were not as useful, claiming these groups were more social and less focussed. The deliberate search and connection with other men for social and academic support is an example of in-group alignment, where the stigmatised connect with other stigmatised for support, and was discussed by a number of the participants. Whilst these are useful connections, bolstering their sense of identity, these choices also served to *separate* the men from their cohort, and continued to *differentiate* them from the women students on their course, reducing their connection to their peers. The deliberate connection (or 'in-group alignment') was not only about study groups, but also about how men students identified potential friends from their class group. They described connecting with other men deliberately, and did so, in part, because there were so few of them. Being unable to get support from other men in class was mentioned as an issue, and inhibited some participant's engagement in class discussions. Anthony felt he might have been more able to manage his difficulties during his first year if there had been more men to connect with on his course, eventually suspending studies and returning the next year to re-take his first year.

These examples of finding connections with other men appear to be used by the participants to navigate their way through the social work course, by seeking similar experiences and viewpoints. Connecting with similar others is a technique used to manage stigma of being different (Barreto and Ellemers 2010). Goffman (1963) suggested 'the nature of an individual, as he himself and we impute it to him, is generated by the nature of his group affiliations' (pg. 138). The participant group affiliations to other men students appeared to be a technique possibly used to manage the isolation and discomfort of being a man in social work education. Most participants described the majority of their social connections were with other men, and believed the lack of other men made it more difficult to identify suitable friends and study partners. A number of participants described (figuratively) looking around the class and seeking other men for friendship. They

used their relationships with other men for support, for both personal and academic reasons, and if they had few of these to draw on, expressed concern by being unable to connect with other men. Several participants were able to use these connections for academic support; they often described that when they connected with women academically, the experience was not 'concentrated enough', with social activity acting as a diversion. A few participants identified the lack of available other men as a challenge for their engagement, and suggested this as part of the reason for any progression issues. It appears that the number of men available, and whether these men align with the age and other identity markers, can be important to some men's progression.

Participants also described feeling silenced, as if they were not able to participate fully, because the gender ratio did not encourage them to behave naturally. Participants were concerned about the response from their peers, and tutors, and restricted their engagement as a result. Many of the men described being more cautious in class discussions, and anxious about repercussions from the women students and lecturers. These men described reducing their engagement in discussions as a way of self-protection. Some participants described situations where they felt they engaged too much, and had the whole group of women 'gang up' on them in response. They learnt not to speak out in these situations, but in doing so, did not engage as fully as would be helpful in class discussions. One of the significant ways that students learn is through participating in class discussions (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005, p.109), and these participants described deliberately reducing their engagement.

Militancy

Participant displays of militant chauvinism provided a further example of in-group alignment. There were relatively few examples of this 'militancy'. These few examples, however, were useful when analysing participant experiences. Militancy is part of the repertoire of techniques used to manage the effects of

stigma. Using this technique, the stigmatised refuse to accept the parameters set by 'normals', suggesting they do not believe their attribute is problematic (Gerschick and Miller 1995). This type of response in this setting can be called 'militant chauvinism' (Coston and Kimmel 2012). A useful example of this technique was provided by Yusuf, and presented in Chapter Six, when he suggested that 'men were as oppressed as women'. He appeared to utterly refute the idea that women were more frequently oppressed in society than men, and expressed irritation about the feminist stances he had witnessed in some class discussions. He suggested men were oppressed because of the difference in employment legislation, without accounting for the wider impact of employment legislation and culture on women's workplace experiences. His belief that 'men are oppressed' was not reported by other participants, but could be considered an example of 'condemn the condemners', a *technique of neutralization* from the work of Sykes and Matza (1957). Their work aligns well with stigma theory (Thompson *et al.* 2003), describing the ways offenders can manage the impact of their offender identity, something that Goffman referred to as their stigma. In this example, Yusuf flipped the condemnation back onto women, suggesting he (and other men) also experienced discrimination, and that discourses to the contrary were part of the oppression. He was not the only participant to have such a display, but these were not replicated by a majority of the men interviewed. These experiences are informative, however, as they indicate a significant level of discomfort with some social work discussions, and some frequent disconnection with their curriculum, tutors, and classmates. They highlight examples of participants aligning with other men in an attempt to manage the perception of being under challenging scrutiny by the women around them.

Of course, in these circumstances, it is important to remember that students can be considered developing social workers, and sometimes they learn by trialling different practices or knowledges. These examples of militancy were surprising from social work students, given the long history of affiliation between social work and feminist theory (Dominelli 2002), and the anti-oppressive stance of the

profession (Cocker and Hafford-Letchfield 2014). These social work positions are codified in international definitions of social work; the International Federation of Social Work states as part of its definition that 'principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work' (IFSW 2014). Given the central position of social justice and equality in social work, it would be expected that the men in this study had participated in a number of class discussions outlining social work's basic tenets, and its long relationship with feminist theory and practice. Yusuf's discomfort with 'openly declared feminists' suggests the likelihood of an ongoing struggle to internalise some foundations of social work knowledge and theories.

Transferrable Skills

The use of transferrable skills to navigate the social work course, particularly time management issues and placement tasks, can be equated with both men and women. However, it is important to note a number of participants described drawing on their previous employment to manage the significant change university study and social work placements required of them. Mike spoke at great length about applying skills learnt during his extensive employment history in planning academic assessment strategies, handling competing demands and responding to placement expectations. Conversely, participants without significant employment history often described struggling with some basic tasks on placement, such as illustrated by Owen's difficulties in 'taking minutes for meetings' and other communication skills that he believed was a major part of why he failed his placement. Drawing on these experiences provided some participants a sense of *autonomy*, a significant element of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005). Ideals of masculinity include self-reliance and the presentation of confidence; what is often termed 'Be a Sturdy Oak' (Brannon 1976). Whilst it can be assumed that women students are also likely to draw on transferrable skills, in the present study being able to do so appeared to have significance for the participants because they were men, and rarely sought outside assistance.

However, some participants who were not able to draw on transferrable skills described low self-esteem, such as described by Tom who subsequently failed placement. Several participants described these experiences as impacting significantly on their self-confidence, and at least two believed they failed because they were not able to display enough confidence. When considering how men engage in social work education, it seems relevant to note their attempts to draw on elements of masculinity, such as autonomy, as a way to resolve any difficulties with entering social work, which they constructed as predominantly feminised. The alignment with the masculine ideal of self-reliance and use of prior experience served to further distance these men from their peers, as opposed to reinforcing a connection to their classmates.

Connecting with Women to Succeed

In contrast to the previously described alignments with men, or 'in-group alignment', several men described connecting to women, whether through their personal or professional worlds. They appeared to use these connections to support their development into becoming social workers. These connections can be helpfully understood by expanding the concept of 'out-group alignment'. Out-group alignment explains actions to minimise stigmatising characteristics, essentially making the stigmatised appear less stigmatised, and more palatable to 'normals'. This study found attempts by participants to link with women ('normals') as one way of managing the effects of the stigma. Some participants described using their relationships with women as a way of understanding interactions with women at university and in practice. They suggested these connections enabled them to work in the world of social work, a 'woman's world' (Williams 1993). They describe these relationships as helping them manoeuvre the interactions in an environment with almost exclusively women as colleagues, and to understand how to interact more smoothly in these settings. These techniques align closely to the presentation by some men in social work of gentler masculinity, called the 'gentle-man' or 'new man' in several texts

considering the way men manage working in WMO (Baines *et al.* 2015; Christie 1998b; Christie 2006). Several participants suggested engaging differently with women than with men on their course, and thought they were able to do this because they drew on previous experience of familial relationships with women as a basis. These relationships were presented as if they helped the participants decipher the social work world of women. They described these experiences as assisting them to understand how to interact with women, how to present themselves conversationally, and how to be comfortable during these conversations. A few participants also suggested that without these experiences they thought they would struggle more on the course, including progression issues.

Some participants believed that they drew on these experiences to understand how to 'be' in social work, as if they were applying techniques learnt elsewhere in this new situation. Cree (1996) suggested social workers, but particularly men, may use parental relationships to facilitate their management of the work. The concerns outlined above about working with children and women also appeared to be partially managed by some participants in this manner. For example, participants that were fathers advised that they were able to draw on another 'out-group alignment', through connecting as parents. They described using this knowledge and connection when working with other people's children, and assessing parenting. Participants without this connection generally stated that they found working with children and assessing parenting more problematic. A number of participants used fatherhood as an experience to assuage concerns about acceptable behaviour with children. Whilst father-participants still described discomfort about working with other people's children, and expressed more concern than they thought a woman would have, they mostly suggested that their fathering experiences were useful for them to know what was appropriate and what actions might expose them to potential allegations. They appeared much less concerned about these situations than participants without children. This intersection of fatherhood and a sense of professional social work

competence was an unexpected outcome of this study, and warrants further study.

Disengagement

Disengagement was found commonly throughout the participant narratives. Many participants frequently felt disconnected from their peers and sometimes from the topics being discussed in class. In studies investigating stigma, disengagement can be a tool used to manage the negative effects of stigma, by reducing the connection between the stigmatised and the challenging environment (Crocker *et al.* 1998; Miller and Kaiser 2001; Varni *et al.* 2012). Participants recounted feeling isolated from the rest of their cohort, not help-seeking, and thinking men are more likely to disengage from the course when experiencing difficulty. Importantly for this setting and population, men are generally more disengaged from university courses than women (Edgar 2015; Kahn *et al.* 2011). When considering a disengagement response combined with knowledge that men use less academic and pastoral support services in university (Woodfield and Thomas 2012), these issues appear to combine for some men, affecting their progression on social work courses. Participants' accounts from the present study suggest an experience of stigma, and being stigmatised encourages a disengagement response from some stigmatised. Because they were men, the participants were already more likely to be disengaged from their course than women, and less likely to access support services and personal tutorial advice. These elements appear to combine for some men, and result in increasing disconnection from peers and support mechanisms, with more progression problems as a consequence.

What appears to be of key importance for this study is how men social work students appear to be separated from their classmates and react with further disengagement. The findings from this study suggest this is both an experience and a reaction to the experience, and seemed to present in a self-confirming

cycle. If men students on social work courses feel more isolated than they believe women are, and if they react to challenges with more disengagement, this suggests an increasing cycle of disengagement for these men with challenges in this setting.

Following from how integral disengagement is to some men's social work course experience, these theorised findings are now employed to adapt the *Student Integration Model* (SIM) (Figure 4). SIM considers engagement an essential element to university student persistence (Tinto, 1975; 1987), suggesting it as the single biggest element of retention. In order to represent the experience of social work student men, the model is adapted to include understanding drawn from the present study. The insertion of placement experience into the model is important, as this was a site of particular concern for the participants in this study, and is integral to student social work experience. The model moves from pre-enrolment on the left following a time line that concludes with final engagement on the right. The model includes connections from the issues described by participants to specific sites of the student journey. The issues of isolation, discomfort, disengagement, and help-seeking, suggest complications for men students in both academic and social experiences.

What emerges when considering this adapted model is how being a man and studying social work carries some challenges. For some men these challenges become more difficult to manage, and may be affected by issues noted for all university student men, such as less engagement with social and academic supports. These general concerns for men also influence progression, and are likely to affect social work student men's experience. These layered issues, both specific to men in social work, and more general for men in higher education, can combine for some men to increase chances of failure or withdrawal. Given that the original model considered engagement and integration to be integral to persistence (Tinto 1993), the dual reasons for disengagement (firstly as a result

of masculinity-aligned behaviour, secondly as a reaction to stigma) are particularly significant when considering the implications of this adapted model. The elements and their implications are explored further below the model.

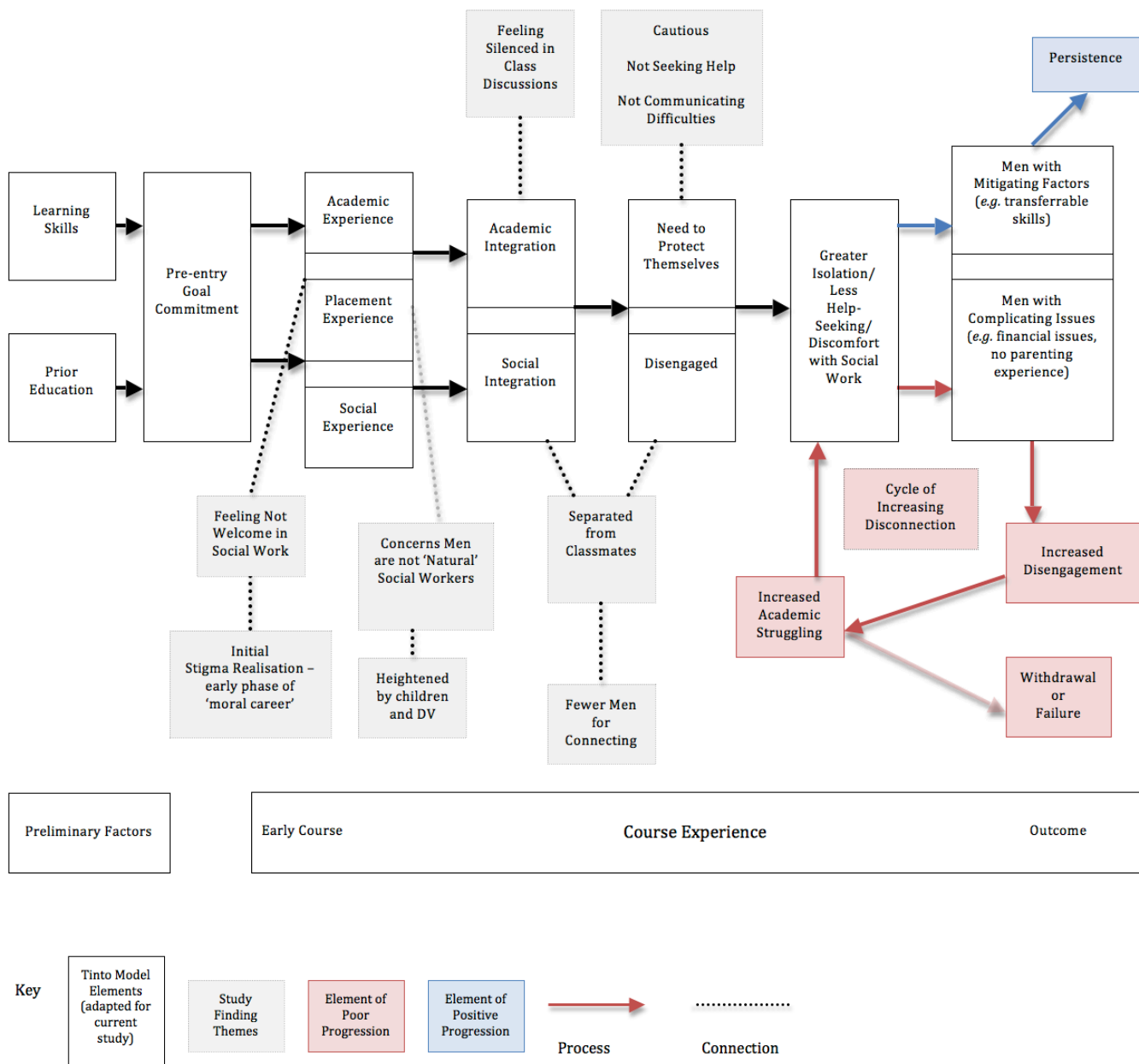


Figure 4 Model of Social Work Student Men's Integration and Progression

When considering this adapted model, it's important to remember that: men have been found to enter university with poorer learning skills than women (OECD 2015a); and, whilst at university, men are less likely to identify academic

problems and less inclined to seek help to address them (HEA 2011; Mark *et al.* 2010; Woodfield and Thomas 2012). The initial course experience, including practice placement and initial academic experience, are outlined in the model as a locus for feelings of discomfort and ostracisation for men on social work courses. Participants frequently described feeling they were not welcome in social work, which highlighted for them they may be out of place. This early course phase is identified in the figure as the site of stigma realisation, the first phase of their 'moral career'. This is when participants frequently described becoming aware that being a man can contain a stigma in this specific environment.

Later in their course experience, placements are a site of particular concern for men social work students (Parker and Crabtree 2014), described by participants in this study largely resulting from concerns of working with children and women. They felt separated from their placement teams, and were often anxious about social tasks required by their placement, because they were men. They felt being a man meant they were more highly visible than the women students and colleagues in their teams. They described feeling they needed to be cautious in their approach to social work situations, including their engagement with colleagues and service users. The next phase of their course experience includes their (mal) integration, both academic and social. This phase includes elements drawn directly from Tinto's model, but the findings presented in this study are aligned to those settings they address. Participants described being less integrated, both academically and socially, than they believed the women on their course were. This integration is negatively affected by self-protection mechanisms (such as not seeking help), and disengagement. The course experience continues with infrequent help-seeking, isolation and discomfort. During the next phase, when some students experience academic struggles, it is important to remember that men university students are less likely to seek help than women, identified both from the participant accounts in this study and by findings presented in other, broader, studies (HEA 2011; Woodfield and Thomas

2012). Their disengagement and tendency to be less inclined to seek help can be interpreted here as activations of *autonomy*, a key component of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005). By attempting to complete their tasks without assistance, participants appear to be seeking self-reliance, and a disinclination to seek assistance.

The final phase, including the cycle of increasing disconnection, are central to understanding the experiences of men in the present study. For some men, they experience a number of layering issues including: complicating issues such as a lack of parenting experience (described here as more pressing for men) or financial difficulties (which could also be experienced by women). These complicating issues are added to the other identified issues for participants of disengagement, lack of help-seeking, and discomfort with social work tasks; and these combined issues encourage failure or withdrawal. These issues include a range of impacts from traditional expectations of men, including autonomy and a repudiation of femininity (Connell 2005; Kimmel 2004), as well as the disengagement found as a coping strategy for stigmatised (Crocker *et al.* 1998) and as a feature of men's university experience (Woodfield and Thomas 2012).

Conversely, eleven participants described no progression problems, and appeared able to draw on a range of mitigating factors, and apply these to their social work course experience. They seemed to use these to manage the disengagement they (and other men) feel from the course and social work, and, possibly as result, had fewer progression issues. Some of them appeared to strive to separate themselves from men in general, by outlining that they are not like 'other men', suggesting a differentiation from others of their gender. It would seem possible that they do this as another potential way to manage the friction between their masculine identity and the caring/femininity implicit with social work. This differentiation seemed to allow them to engage more easily with the discussions of men's oppression of others, perhaps because they achieved some

psychic distance from the offending group. Others described using experience with women in their family to navigate the important relationships with women: peers, tutors and service users. They drew on these experiences as a way to understand how to engage with their classmates, and how to connect productively with others on placement. Fatherhood was also mentioned as a benefit by most of the men with no progression issues. They described using this experience in class discussions and on placement, when they needed to interact with children or assess a service user's parenting. Previous employment experience was also useful, and described by several men as helping them manage their course and placement situations. The participants with fewer progression issues appeared to employ a number of mechanisms, often in conjunction, to more successfully manoeuvre their social work course experience.

Drawing on the participant narratives of this study, it appears that social work education can present men students with several barriers, including separation from their peers, concerns about working with children and women, and challenges with some topics in social work. The original SIM (Tinto 1993) suggests the model can identify experiences in the student journey that positively or negatively impact on student retention. In essence, it suggests that the greater the number or impact of the negative experiences, then the less likely a student is to persist on their chosen course (Tinto 1993). When the specific issues and findings reported from the present study are analysed and synthesised, there are a number of barriers that militate against men social work students' progression. The resultant adapted model seeks to illustrate how these barriers are related to student progression, but also provides insight to how such students persist to complete their course. When considering student persistence, SIM suggests that the more *connected* a student is to the university and course, both academically and socially, then *the more likely they are to remain* and not drop out or fail. When discussing updates to SIM and new theoretical applications, Tinto (2006) suggests that 'throughout these changes and the putting forth of alternative

models, one fact has remained clear. Involvement, or what is increasingly being referred to as *engagement*, matters and it matters most during the critical first year' (pg. 4, emphasis added). This focuses the implications for this model on student engagement. What is shown from the analysis of participant interviews in the present study is that they believed they were not as engaged as the women on their course, for a variety of reasons. This is supported by other, broader, previously conducted studies about men's engagement at university (Woodfield and Thomas 2012), and about individual's reactions to stigma (Crocker *et al.* 1998). If engagement is so central to student retention, and men social work students are more disengaged than women, then it is not surprising that they have greater progression issues. When this is considered in the context of this setting, the impact on engagement suggests men are likely to have a number of *additional* barriers to face in order to progress effectively on social work courses than women. Importantly, some men are more able to manage these barriers than other men, using a variety of techniques (such as in- and out-group alignments and transferrable skills) to assist them to address these impediments.

Summary

This discussion began by drawing together the findings from the analysis of 21 social work student interviews. This analysis provided a range of issues linked to men's progression on social work courses. These issues can arise from a disjuncture between ideal masculine roles and the feminised role of social work, and result in some men feeling silenced, and most participants feeling a need for self-protection, with widespread descriptions of disengagement. When stigma and gender theories are applied to the findings, and these are used to adapt a model of student integration, it appears participants started the course with a disadvantage that they may not be aware of. They appear to experience their course as men with a situationally-specific stigma. They seem to become aware of the challenges caused by being a man throughout their course experiences,

particularly whilst on placement. Participant narratives suggested a dual spoiled identity, with their social work identity spoiled by being men, and their masculinity spoiled by trying to become a social worker. Participants showed a multifaceted range of mechanisms employed to manage the stigma of being a man in a setting generally assumed to be more appropriate for women. Using in-group alignment, they connect with other men as a source of support, but when there are few other men on their course this can be problematic, as their options for support may be limited (as well as disconnecting them from the main body of their peers). They also displayed out-group alignment, by connecting their previous relationships with women as a source of knowledge and skills to draw upon in order to navigate relationships with women, which they must do frequently in social work. The disengagement described by participants is supported by wider studies, but the description here is more nuanced because of the narrower setting of social work programmes. Disengaging is a stigma-management technique, but also complicit in men's general university experience. Disengaging is problematic when considered in relation to university student retention, as it is influential in student decisions to leave their course. With separation, isolation and disengagement consistently found in studies relating to stigma, when social work student men's experience is considered through this lens, their poorer progression becomes more explicable. With the additional barriers that they face to their progression than women, the reasons for their strain at joining the profession is shown clearly. The final chapter outlines recommendations for social work educators and policy makers to improve the experience and retention of social work student men, future areas for research in this area, presented as concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

This chapter summarises and concludes this thesis. It begins with an outline the context for the study, re-capping the main research question and what is already known that can be related to men in social work education. It also summarises what participants said about their experience of studying social work. It then draws together the theoretical applications applied in Chapter Seven, presenting how we can understand the participant experiences theoretically. Next, it summarises the main original contributions of this thesis. Drawing together what has been learned during this study allows the chapter to present some possible responses to assist men in social work education, derived from the analysis and theorising of the participant experiences. Lastly, some areas of further research are identified.

This study explored men's experiences on social work courses in England. It investigated how these experiences relate to men's greater progression problems on social work courses. It set out to answer the following research question:

Why are there greater progression problems for men than for women in social work courses in England?

To answer this question, relevant literature was reviewed and an interpretivist, qualitative study was conducted.

When exploring the context for this study, a range of different literatures were examined, most notably education, gender and social work literatures. It was important to present these diverse knowledges coherently, to enable the context for the present study to be understood. In order to do this, the study began with education literature. This literature suggests that girls and women have better achievement in education, almost without exception. Some subjects are highly

associated with a specific gender, such as men in STEM subjects, and women in education and social sciences (Hillman and Robinson 2016; OECD 2015a). Of particular note for this study, men are more likely to leave courses where they are in a minority, where women are more than 75% of the students in the course (Severiens and ten Dam 2012), but conversely, women are more likely to remain on a course where they are in a minority (Johnes and McNabb 2004; Kamphorst *et al.* 2015). These differences in the ways men and women engage, attain and retain on university courses is consistent and significant. There is a great deal of attention on the retention of university students, producing many reports and studies annually around the world. This proliferation includes differences in describing the issue, making simple multi-national comparisons difficult. What appears to be a growing international concern, however, is men's poorer participation and attainment when compared to women (Breen *et al.* 2010). Importantly for this study, men do not use university support services as much as women, and feel a sense of disengagement from the university and their course (Woodfield and Thomas 2012).

Using this general knowledge about men and education, it was necessary to consider how men experience working in and studying to join WMO. The literature suggests a combination of challenges and benefits for men as both qualified professionals and students in WMO (Hanlon 2012; Shen-Miller and Smiler 2015; Simpson 2009; Williams 1993). Social work, nursing and primary school teaching are often grouped and called 'women's work' (along with other occupations), and have many more women working in them than men, termed in this thesis as women-majority occupations (WMO). Men usually occupy more than an equitable share of senior and powerful positions in these occupations, though, with swifter moves into management called the 'glass escalator effect' (Williams 1992). Even with this advantage, a number of studies show that men experience barriers, often related to their masculinity and sense of isolation from other men. There are often concerns that men in WMO can pose a threat because they are in situations where few other men are; because of their

occupation, these men have access to individuals with vulnerabilities. Studies suggest men in these occupations and studying to join them undertake a range of 'gender work' to manage these challenges (McDowell 2015).

The knowledge from these other WMO is useful, and it seemed logical to consider how this broader literature related to social work specifically. There are some similarities found between social work and these other occupations, but this study also found some distinctions. One such difference is that men's position in social work is sometimes identified as problematic, because of men's greater violence and oppression of others (Pringle 2001), in addition to their over-representation in positions of power (McPhail 2004; Pease 2011). There are concerns noted in other studies that men social workers may be concerned other people think they might either be gay, sexual predators, or in a role predominantly associated with women. Some men social workers are also found to undertake gender work to re-present their masculinity into more acceptable forms, such as promoting more gentle approaches, or highlighting the masculine elements of their role and thereby creating distance from the more feminine aspects of the role.

As the thesis shifted to more specific knowledge, it moved from considering men's experience in social work generally to that of men in social work education. This literature shows men have worse progression in social work courses in England, and this has been examined with some depth in this study. Their progression is significantly worse in each of the categories of deferral, withdrawal and failure, with a non-statistically significant finding for referral. Importantly for this study, the withdrawal and failure rates were significantly higher, with strong probability scores. The secondary analysis of GSCC data was useful for this study as it provided further context about men's progression, even when managing for other relevant variables. These variables included two other categories shown in other studies to have high progression issues: ethnicity and

disability. Even when managing the impact of these other variables, men were still more likely to fail, withdraw and defer than women; and did so significantly in statistical terms. Whilst there were previous studies examining progression of social work students, they presented men as one of several groups with progression issues. The findings of failure and withdrawal are of primary focus for this study, as these outcomes result in a man leaving the course.

Twenty-one social work student men studying at seven universities in England were interviewed, and the data were analysed using thematic analysis. During the analysis, theories of stigma, masculinity and student retention were mobilised to illuminate their accounts. This analysis revealed that participants experienced a complicated array of layered challenges. They did not describe a neat, orderly series of events that they all experienced. Instead, their accounts suggest they all experienced some of the challenges, with several participants describing multiple issues. Some men appear able to manage these issues, and for others, these challenges appeared to contribute to their progression problems. Participants described a range of challenges, including some that were not gender-specific. These general concerns include thinking their course was difficult, and concerns with time management and financial responsibilities; each of these was considered as likely to be a consideration for women social work students, and so was presented as contextual understanding.

In addition to these general student concerns, participants described experiences that appeared to be specifically related to being men, and not likely to be experienced by women. A number of participants felt they (and men) were not welcome in social work, including some examples of negativity toward men in the social work profession. Many of the participants described feeling uncomfortable in social work classrooms, and some thought men were not 'natural' social workers. This meant that many of the participants felt they did not have the right to hold a view about essential social work tasks, such as assessing parenting.

They felt that women possessed more ability to conduct social work, because of an assumed natural affinity between women, femininity, caring and social work roles. Most of the participants were very concerned about the potential for allegations, and about working with children. They frequently explained how this possibility meant they considered carefully when they interacted with service users. A number of the men suggested they found it difficult to discuss topics freely in class, and suggested a lack of confidence; they aligned this clearly with feeling 'outnumbered' by women in their social work course. Participants appeared to feel the need for self-protection: they felt they were deliberately more cautious than a woman would need to be, including being worried about the potential for allegations; they did not seek help readily, even when they were having academic trouble. Participant narratives suggest they were disengaged from their course, particularly because they thought they had less social connections than the women on their course. They were both isolated and separated from their classmates. Their study groups included less social connections, and there were fewer men for them to identify as potential friends. When considering these issues, they appear to combine for some men, thereby increasing the likelihood of failure and withdrawal. Imagine a young man with no children and some academic difficulties that comes to study social work; with the accounts gathered, he would likely be concerned about how he would work with children, and how he could discuss domestic abuse in class. He is also likely to feel disengaged from his peers, because there are few men to connect with as friends. On placement, he may hear some gendered comments about how men are less suited to social work tasks, and need to consider potential allegations of sexual misconduct. If he has academic problems, as a man, he may be unlikely to seek help, out of concerns for appearing 'weak' and not autonomous. This list of concerns suggest a series of challenges he must address to progress. This example is an amalgam of participant narratives, showing how the issues can combine for some men to create a series of interconnected challenges for men social work students. Whilst most participants did not include all of these issues in their experience, some did include several of the challenges, and these men

also had greater progression issues, such as failed placements or withdrawing from the course.

Theoretical Developments

When attempting to understand these participant narratives, this thesis used stigma theory (Goffman 1963), concepts of hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan *et al.* 1985) and university student integration (Tinto 1975; 1987). By employing concepts of stigma, during the analysis it appeared that participants were describing a double 'spoiled identity'. For some men, it appeared that becoming a social worker could be spoiling their masculinity, and for some participants being a man was spoiling their social work identity. They used several techniques to manage these spoiled identities, such as connecting with other men, or highlighting their relationships with women, and, significantly, disengagement. They aligned with other men to form study groups without women, and sought friendships with other men. They describe drawing on relationships with women to help them feel more comfortable when relating to a large number of women. By entering social work, these men felt they were challenging the predominant view that women are more naturally caring than men, and experienced negative responses from other people. Participants appeared to use these techniques to address the isolation and challenges experienced as a result of feeling out of place in social work and classroom experiences.

The understanding derived from the application of these theories to participant experiences was used to adapt the *Student Integration Model* (Tinto 1975; 1987), thereby creating a revised model that depicts more accurately participants' experience of studying social work. This adapted model suggested several sites where men social work students are likely to experience strains against their integration. Men enter university with lower educational standards than women

(generally), men social work students are isolated and separated from the women students, and men are less likely to seek help when having difficulty. For some men, these issues appear to compile and result in greater academic issues, encouraging further disengagement (which is also a response to experiencing stigma). Given this range of impediments and poorer outcomes, it seems reasonable to assume that men's poorer progression is linked to their experiential differences, particularly when compared to how the participants think women social work students experience social work study. Their experiences and responses to their experience suggest greater disengagement from the course and university, and student disengagement is significantly connected with progression issues.

Original Contributions

This thesis uses multiple sites to develop understanding of men's experience of studying social work. Previous studies have been single-site (Parker and Crabtree 2014), or before becoming a social worker required a degree-level qualification and in Scotland (Cree 2001). By interviewing men from seven different courses, a broader understanding of their experience is gleaned from their accounts.

This study used stigma theory with a population and situation not previously studied. It develops both the theory and knowledge of the phenomenon. Theorising participant's experience to include a double spoiled identity developed understandings of this theory, with the two identities affected by choices made by the participants. Expanding stigma to consider this context has not been undertaken previously, and proved a fruitful application of the theory. Previous studies exploring men's privilege and stigma (Coston and Kimmel 2012) have examined specific identities, such as class, sexuality or disability. This study

develops the theory by investigating a situation where men chose a route imbued with stigma, a different experience than inheriting or acquiring an identity.

This study develops knowledge about men's higher education experience, particularly on WMO and social work courses. Developing our understanding of these men's experiences can improve their progression, but may also help to improve gender equality. Participant accounts show that men do not engage with academic support, and some men think using these services imply they are weak. Ideals of masculinity that demand autonomy hinder men's ability to seek help even when they may be experiencing academic difficulty. Men studying to join social work or other WMO believe there are innate barriers to their connection to the profession; participants frequently felt they were less suited to social work than a woman would be. These challenges connect directly to their progression on courses of this type, because their responses encourage further disengagement and compound men's greater general disconnection from both university and course.

This study also improves understanding about the staunchly gendered boundaries for men's employment as understood by the social work students interviewed here. Accounts from this study suggest these boundaries are easily recognised by men social work students, highlighting how challenging some men find these experiences. The specific concerns noted by participants about working with and around children, particularly in relation to participant concerns of allegations, develops our understanding of these situations and how men can engage with and manoeuvre through these boundaries.

What Have We Learned?

The present study sought men social work students' experiences on English social work courses; the following outlines what has been learned through analysing these accounts that might be used to improve men's social work student experience and progression.

This study found frequent descriptions of disengagement and isolation, with each participant expressing some semblance of disconnection from their peers and course. Most participants felt they were not as connected to their peers as the women students on their course. If social work courses encouraged mixed gender study groups, this would likely help men's assimilation into the social work profession. These groups could assist men's connection to the rest of the course, and reduce the disengagement described by participants in this study. Because men are likely to start their course more disengaged than women, and likely have poorer study skills, it would be helpful if these groups assist them to connect both academically and socially with their course to encourage retention.

The participants frequently described using support and help differently than they believed women did. As seen in this study, some men are unlikely to seek support because they were worried they would look as if they *needed* help and were unable to complete the task unaided; some men in this study recommended more mandated tutorial sessions. Making more tutorials mandatory would likely have improved their engagement. When participants described mandated sessions, they suggested attending these would not make them appear 'weak', and it would appear making these mandatory would help men's need to present autonomy by not seeking help.

Several men in this study described feeling less suited than women to social work, and often believed other people thought men were less suited, as well.

From these accounts, it seems reasonable to suggest that courses could specifically address the perception that social work is a 'caring' profession, and how some individuals can consider it as women's profession. Through a discussion about 'innate' abilities towards social work, men students may be able to understand how men can engage successfully in social work roles. This discussion about gender roles and occupation choices may help men students understand deeply ingrained beliefs about gender roles and occupational suitability. Participants in this study were acutely aware of societal perceptions about gender and gender roles, but often found it challenging to manage conflicts with these norms raised by choosing roles typically undertaken by women.

Men in this study frequently discussed finding specific class sessions challenging; these topics included domestic abuse, men's oppression of others and practice with children and their families. As these topics are central to social work education, it seems reasonable that class discussions would need to include these topics. But participants in this study often found these discussions made them feel as if they were being singled out, and some felt they were being asked to represent all men. Being highlighted in this manner appeared to increase their sense of separation from classmates, and several men felt uncomfortable or unable to represent and explain the actions of other men. Managing group discussion during these sessions is important to ensure men do not feel unfairly targeted. Equally important is to ensure the men are assisted to understand the negative impact caused by abuse perpetrated by other men, and the possible ways to address these impacts.

Direct practice with children was a significant area of concern for many of the participants in this study, even some of the father-participants and the men with experience of working with children. Participants frequently did not feel comfortable when working around children, and were concerned about the potential for allegations. Several men also felt completely unsuited to assess

parenting. It was surprising even participants with children and previous experience of working with children sometimes felt challenged by this area of social work practice. Whilst some men had specific conversations with PEs or tutors, not all participants described this sort of engagement; some of the men's descriptions suggested these conversations did not completely address their concerns. Given the range and diversity of concerns found in this study, it seems reasonable to suggest social work educators discuss direct practice with children and their families with men students to assist supporting them. Concerns about potential allegations were described frequently, with some participants unsure how to work safely with children and women service users. Men without children in this study described being more consistently uncomfortable in these situations than fathers.

Further Research

This study raised further queries about the social work profession's inconsistent agreement with men as social workers. Participants frequently described feeling unwelcomed by and uncomfortable in the social work profession. Our understanding of men's position in social work could be developed by exploring the challenge of men being social workers with considerations of the increasing proportion of women in social work, and the greater numbers of men dismissed from the profession for inappropriate relationships with service users. These factors suggest a decreasing proportion of men in the social work profession.

Considering how to support men social work students to be more comfortable when working with children would be useful. This study was able to identify this as a significant area of challenge. By identifying specific practices that are useful and self-protective, these could be provided to men students to assist their concerns about working with children. In particular, how to support men that do

not have children would be of use, as these men were found in this study to have more challenges with social work tasks.

Related to this consideration of how men work with children as social workers, a more specific consideration of how fatherhood can intersect with social work men's sense of competence would be an area of further interesting study. Several participants in this study recounted how they drew on their experience of being fathers to enable them to more comfortably work with children, although they still expressed some concerns.

The analysis from this study suggests young men are more likely to have several of the challenges described: they are less likely to have had children, and less likely to have significant previous work experience. This is concerning, particularly as the profile of men in social work in England includes a higher proportion of older men close to retirement, and a decreasing ratio of men entering the profession. Considering how best to support these younger men would move beyond the scope of this study to determine what solutions might work better for younger men as one way to help improve the age and proportion of men in the social work profession in England.

The theoretical developments from the current study could be applied to considering the experience of men in other WMO. Theories of stigma and hegemonic masculinity could be used to examine these men's experience and may improve our understanding of men in WMO generally, as most of the knowledge currently produced is separated by professional disciplines.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Basic information:

- ethnicity
- age
- previous academic qualifications/routes into social work
- Are you a 1st generation student?

1. Can you describe your experience of studying social work?

Prompts

- What were your expectations before you came to University?
- Does your experience match your expectations?
- Can you describe the social work students on your programme?
- Academic experience – study habits
- What is the programme like?
- Is there a particular approach used?
- What is the staff profile – gender, ethnicity, sexuality
- Identity and/or sexuality of students

Why did you choose social work?

Prompts

- i. Views of family & friends
- ii. Family background

2. Have you experienced any difficulties progressing through the programme?

- Are there things that the University could do that would make it easier for male students?

3. What are the progression issues for men about, do you think?

Prompts

Is it about entry standards/approach?

Is it about study habits?

Or is it about 'maleness'?

Management of personal issues

When did you first know that you were doing poorly?

How did you manage it?

Which of the supports did you use?

How often did you use the personal tutoring system? What are the things that you spoke about?

Using pastoral and academic supports?

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: Educational Experiences of Social Work Student Men

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

- **What is the purpose of the study?**
The purpose of the study is to explore the educational experiences of male social work students. The study also seeks to explore understandings of men's lives that interact with their social work education.
- **Who can take part?**
For the main study, I am seeking to recruit 20-25 undergraduate student men from different social work courses.
- **What does the study involve?**
Your participation involves a single audio-recorded interview lasting between 45-90 minutes, in a setting comfortable for you.
- **Are there any risks or disadvantages of taking part in the study?**
There are no expected risks or disadvantages of taking part in this study. The interviews are not expected to cause distress, although that is a potential with any research interview. Participants should hopefully gain a better understanding of the issues surrounding progression for social work student men. At the end of the study, participants will be signposted to a copy of the thesis, and any planned future publications. You are welcome to withdraw at any point, without giving a reason.
- **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**
Any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Participant information provided in the interviews will be anonymised, *i.e.* identified by pseudonyms only. The data will be stored on a password-protected computer at the student's home and only accessed by the PhD research student conducting the study. Any contact details that you choose to provide for communicating about the research will be stored separately from the data collected, and will be password protected. No one, other than the researcher involved in the project, will see or have access to your details. There are select circumstances when information may need to be shared with someone other than the participant, and this is only in the unexpected description of illegal activity or practice in contravention of the social work code of ethics. It can sometimes be helpful to use anonymised quotes in reports, publications, verbal presentations or teaching materials to illustrate particular themes or issues. Whenever these quotes are used, participant names and identifying characteristics will be changed to ensure confidentiality.
- **What will happen to the results of the research?**

Once the interview is completed and transcribed, you will be emailed a copy of the transcript to allow you to confirm or redact any data. Once the study is completed, you will be emailed a link to the thesis with the findings and recommendations. The anonymised findings may also be used in conference presentations or published in academic journals. You will not be identifiable in any reports or publications of the research.

- **Who is organising the research?**

The study will be conducted by Mr. Jason Schaub (PhD research student) under the supervision of Dr. Louise Brown and Prof. Ian Butler at the University of Bath. The study has been approved by the Department of Social and Policy Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Bath and adheres to British Sociological Association (BSA) guidelines for ethical research practice.

- **Contact for further information or assistance:**

For further information or assistance concerning the study please contact Jason Schaub by email: jhs26@bath.ac.uk. As the interviews are conversational, you need only address topics or issues with which you feel comfortable. If however you become concerned about any topic or issue that might arise as a result of the study then please contact the researcher who will attempt to direct you to some resources including your GP, and your University counselling and support services. Your employer may also be able to offer access to further useful information or support.

Thank you for reading this information.

Appendix C: Consent Form

Title of Project: Educational Experiences of Social Work Student Men

Name of Researcher: Jason Schaub

Contact details: jhs26@bath.ac.uk

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles or presentations.
4. I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentations, and that identifying characteristics will be altered to protect my identity.
5. I agree to the interview being audio-recorded.
6. I agree to take part in the above study.

☐☐☐☐☐☐

Participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix D: Ethics Application

This template must be completed for all research grant applications and should accompany the University's Research Proposal form (RS1) for approval by the Head of Department.

(Additional departmental information may be incorporated as appropriate, for example from an existing resources form).

Please note that this procedure is intended to help researchers consider ethical implications of research activity. Researchers are responsible for deciding, in conjunction with their departmental guidelines and professional disciplinary standards, whether a more extensive review is necessary.

To be completed by Principal Investigator/Staff member

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Brief Title of Project | Issues of educational progression for social work student men |
| Names of Principal/other Investigators | Jason Schaub |

SECTION 1: COMPLETION FOR ALL RESEARCH

| <i>Are there ethical implications concerned with the following general issues? If yes, please provide details below</i> | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Data storage (eg Confidentiality, availability, length of storage, etc) | No |
| 2. Are you free to publish the results? eg Are there any restrictions raised by contractual issues? | Yes |
| 3. Effect on/damage to the environment eg Hazardous waste may be produced; water or air might be polluted; injurious pathogens might be released; damage to ecological systems/habitats. | Nil |

| <i>Specific Issues</i> | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------|
| 4. Does the research involve human participants in any way? (Please note if you are processing personal data you need to tick 'Yes'.) | No | Complete only Section 1 |
| | Yes X | Complete Sections 1 and 2 |
| 5. Does the research involve animals in any way? | No X | Complete only Section 1 |
| | Yes | Complete Sections 1 and 3 |

Demonstration of Ethical Considerations

Please outline the ethical issues which will need to be managed during the course of the activity.

This research seeks to explore the experiences and progression of social work student men on pre-qualifying undergraduate social work programmes in England using predominantly qualitative methods. The primary research question is: 'Why are there greater progression problems for men than for women in social work courses in the England?'. This is followed by two further questions: 'What is the nature of these progression problems?', and; 'What can the lived experience of men social work students tell us about the factors that might hinder their progression into SW?'.

To answer these questions, a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews enables the data gathered to explore the lived experience of the student men and perceptions of what might be hindering their progression. In addition, the views of Directors of Studies (DoS) are expected to help illuminate some potential issues hindering men's progression. As a result, the sample will be comprised of approximately 5 DoS of undergraduate social work courses from different HEIs, and approximately 25 undergraduate social work student men. The sample HEIs will be selected to provide variability (using the following variables: pre- and post-92 University, geography, research-intensity, number of social work students). The students will be selected predominantly by opportunistic sampling, from the HEIs already utilised for DoS interviews. The sample will need to be monitored to ensure that it broadly reflects the demographic profile of social work student men, with variables such as these to determine their broad reflection of that profile: ethnicity, disability, previous educational background. This demographic profile has been determined by undertaking an analysis of secondary quantitative data obtained from the General Social Care Council (GSCC), the former regulating body for social work education in England (closed in 2012).

Contact will be firstly to each HEI DoS (via email) with an individual interview request and a request to allow access to the men students on their undergraduate social work course. A further request to the DoS will be for an open call flyer to be forwarded via email to student men on these courses to recruit participants for student interviews. It is hoped that this open call will generate sufficient numbers and breadth of participants, but snowballing may be required to bolster the student sample size and diversity. If this is required, further emails to the interview participants will be constructed, requesting contact with other student men they are aware of.

These interviews with both Directors of Studies (DoS) and students will be semi-structured, using a broad set of prepared questions as well as follow-up prompts. These interviews will be audio-recorded with the recordings being transcribed,

and then analysed using thematic analysis (Ryan & Bernard 2003) with the assistance of NVivo data management software.

The professional codes of conduct and ethics for social work do not specifically cover research (GSCC 2010; BASW 2012), but the widely used British Sociological Association's professional codes (BSA 2002) discusses the following key points (amongst others): the need for researchers to be aware of and follow the appropriate laws and regulations; reporting research accurately, including the limitations of the project; respect for privacy of participants, and; maintaining confidentiality. This framework is used predominantly throughout this research in order to ensure a rigorous ethical framework is maintained.

Interviewing participants requires clear informed consent processes and care needed to avoid unnecessary distress for the participants. Informed consent will be garnered in a two-stage process, beginning with a gatekeeper. Each HEI site will have a gatekeeper (the course leader or programme lead for undergraduate social work). These gatekeepers will be approached with an invitation letter and phone call to forward information sheets to appropriate final year social work undergraduate men (based upon the criteria found in stage one). These participant information sheets will cover the nature and scope of the research, as well as the likely expectations of taking part. These information sheets will also outline the following ethical considerations:

- Participants' right to withdraw at any point with no impact, including no expectation or need to participate; their participation will have no impact upon their marks or progression through their course.
- All data will be anonymised prior to any publication; their programmes will not have access to recordings or transcripts at any point.
- Interview recordings and data will remain secure, with only the researcher having access.
- Participants will be sent a copy of their transcript for verification purposes prior to commencing data analysis.
- Participants' will have the ability subsequently alter or remove their data from the research process at any point prior to concluding data analysis, with no repercussions.
- That there is no expected distress from taking part, although appropriate signposting services will be identified to the participant if such distress occurs.

Secondly, prior to undertaking interviews, the participant information sheet will be reviewed with each participant, explaining each point, asking if there is the need for clarification. There is also an informed consent form that each participant will be asked to sign with the researcher retaining a copy. Participants' information will be kept confidential, unless they make statements with criminal or professional implications.

It is not anticipated the interview will cause distress to participants, however the topic areas may be sensitive for some participants (particularly those struggling on their course – or those who have withdrawn or been removed from courses).

The subject area will be discussed with each participant prior to interview, and each participant will be monitored for signs of distress. As a qualified social worker, the researcher has experience of working with individuals under stressful interview circumstances, and will halt any interview that appears distressing for a participant. Appropriate signposting services at each HEI will be sourced prior interviews, and shared with a participant if distress is noticed or if the participant requests. These signposting services will include (but may not be limited to, depending on the resources at each HEI): students' personal tutor, the University counselling service, and external counselling options for those participants not wishing to engage with the University-provided services.

There is the further ethical concern of sensitive information that may arise during an interview. Prior to each interview, the researcher will explain that if an academic breach or criminal offence is disclosed, the researcher will inform the relevant authority; in the former, the course leader for that student; and in the latter, the police. This is because these students are undertaking social work qualifying courses, requiring that they uphold the codes of conduct for social work professionals when qualified (BASW 2012).

Declarations

I confirm that the statements in Sections 1-3 describe the ethical issues that will need to be managed during the course of this research activity.

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Principal Investigator | Signature: <i>Jason Schaub</i> Date: 04 March, 2013 |
| Second reader (This will normally be a person <u>external</u> to the project team.) | Signature: Date: |
| Head of Department | Signature: Date: |

Please return this form to your Departmental Research Ethics Officer. (Issues will be monitored for incorporation into an annual departmental report to be submitted to the University Ethics Committee.)

SECTION 2: FOR COMPLETION IF YOUR RESEARCH INVOLVES HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

If any of the answers to these questions are 'yes', please confirm in the space below how the ethical issues will be managed during the course of the activity.

Compulsory question for consideration by all disciplines:

| | Yes | No |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| Will the study involve obtaining or processing personal data relating to living individuals, (eg involve recording interviews with subjects even if the findings will subsequently be made anonymous)? <i>Note: If the answer to this question is 'yes' you will need to ensure that the provisions of the Data Protection Act are complied with. In particular you will need to seek advice to ensure that the subjects provide sufficient consent and that the personal data will be properly stored, for an appropriate period of time). Information is available from the University Data Protection Website and dataprotection-queries@lists.bath.ac.uk</i> | X | |

Departments may amend the following list to include topics of particular relevance to their discipline(s).

| | Yes | No |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|----|
| 1. Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (eg children, people with learning disabilities) | | X |
| 2. Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (eg students at school, members of self-help group, residents of a nursing home) | X | |
| 3. Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? (eg covert observation of people in non-public places) | | X |
| 4. Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics? (eg sexual activity, drug use) | X Potentially | |
| 5. Are drugs, placebos or other substances (eg food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants and/or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind? | | X |
| 6. Will blood or tissue samples be obtained from participants? <i>Note: If the answer to this question is 'yes' you will need to be aware of obligations under the Human Tissue Act, see further information at http://www.bath.ac.uk/internal/ethics/committee/HTA.html</i> | | X |
| 7. Is pain or more than very mild discomfort likely to result from the study? | | X |
| 8. Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life? | | X |
| 9. Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing? | | X |
| 10. Will financial inducements (or other expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? | | X |
| 11. Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS? <i>Note: If the answer to this question is 'yes' you will need to submit an application to the NHS through IRAS, see: http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/applications/integrated-research-application-system/</i> | | X |

Section 2: Demonstration of Ethical Considerations

It is necessary to gather, store and dispose of research data within the boundaries of the Data Protection Act 1998. These points have been broadly discussed in the above discussion (page 3), with consideration given for consent, security, anonymisation and confidentiality, and data gathering. The further ethical considerations of engaging with gatekeepers and support for participants' unlikely distress are also discussed.

All data gathered will be gathered, stored, managed and disposed of under the of the Data Protection Act, 1998. The data will be stored securely, with only the researcher having access to it (either in a password-secured University-provided web-server or, if paper, in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home). All participant names and identifying details will be removed using pseudonyms prior to any data being published, as well as removing HEI names and identifying characteristics from the documentation to prevent identification of HEIs, DoSs, as well as individual students. This data will be retained until September 2017, to allow for completion of the current PhD, and the planned follow-up publications, at which point all data will be destroyed.